

Digital Local Studies Content in Irish Public Libraries: An Analysis and Overview

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Abstract

The aim of this research was to provide an overview and analysis of digital local studies content in Irish public libraries today. There were five objectives: to provide an overview of the content including the formats; to explore the factors that influence the creation of digital content; to investigate the views of local studies staff towards digital content including training needs and perceived impact upon services; to discover the extent to which web 2.0 and library 2.0 are used in Irish local studies collections; and to explore future issues that may impact upon local studies and digital content.

The literature showed that digitisation has resulted in change for local studies services, presenting them both with challenges and opportunities. This was no different in Ireland, where national policy and developments in recent years encouraged the development of digital content by local studies services. A paucity of studies on Irish libraries and digitisation was revealed by the review of the literature.

A mixed methods research design was adopted for this study. A coding schedule for a website content analysis was developed using the existing literature on evaluating digital content and website. This quantitative data collection method proved very effective at evaluating all Irish public library local studies library websites. A mixed methods questionnaire was circulated to all local studies librarians in Ireland. The quantitative and qualitative data received was gathered and analysed, along with the data compiled from the content analysis.

The results of the website content analysis indicated that there were huge contrasts in the quantity of digital content available on the websites of Irish public libraries. Nearly a quarter had no digital content at all, while many other authorities had extensive digitised content up on their website. There was also much diversity in the formats of digital content online across all library authorities.

The responses from the questionnaire partially explained this disparity, along with answering the other objectives of this study. It was evident from the answers given that local librarians recognize the need for increased digital content being made available. Various barriers and issues to digital content creation were also identified by respondents. The majority of respondents were in favour of increased national co-ordination. Training requirements were also listed. The AskAboutIreland portal website was recognized as needing change, but offering potential for future projects.

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed (candidate)

Date

STATEMENT 1

This work is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s). Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background

The growth of the internet over the past twenty years and the possibilities offered by digital content creation is widely recognized in the literature as resulting in a fundamental change in local studies librarianship (Reid, 2003; Rudyard, 2001; Smith & Rowley, 2012). A change in the entire philosophy of local studies librarianship has been called for (Reid & Macafee, 2007). This is no different in Ireland, where the addition of digital local studies content has been integral to public library policy for over fifteen years now.

The seminal 1998 Government review of the Irish public library service, *Branching Out*, first recommended that a large-scale programme of digitisation of local studies material be undertaken by Irish local studies libraries (Government of Ireland, 1998). A national digitisation strategy, *Changing Libraries*, was launched in 2005 to build on the work already undertaken. The *AskAboutIreland* website (www.askaboutireland.ie) was developed as a portal website to showcase digital content from local studies collections (McDermott, 2008). The current public library strategy for Ireland, *Opportunities for All*, calls for the continued digitisation of local studies material in the coming years (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, Government of Ireland, 2013, p. 40).

A review of the literature (included in the next chapter) shows that there is little literature on digital content and Irish local studies websites. There is no study of how Irish public libraries are using digital local studies content. Barry and Tedd's 2007 study of Irish local studies websites focused on

evaluating the design, usability, currency and branding of each site. By their own admission, their research and evaluative criteria used did not satisfactorily take account of digital content though (p. 166). There is a clear need for an overview and analysis of digital local studies content in Irish public libraries today. This work is an attempt to address this need.

The gap in research on digital content in Irish libraries, along with the continued emphasis on digitisation of local studies material in the public library policy all contributed towards this author choosing a research question based on Irish local studies and digital content. Nearly ten years after the *Changing Libraries* digitisation strategy was launched, now is an opportune time for an overview and analysis to be undertaken.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The central research question that underpins this study is:

- How are Irish public libraries presenting and creating digital local studies content for their websites today?

The supplementary research questions that accompany this are:

- What are the formats and features of this digital content?
- What are the views of staff towards digital content today?
- Does the creation of digital content impact upon service delivery?
- Do staff receive training? Have they any training requirements?
- What current or future issues need to be considered?

The central aim of this study is to present an informative overview and analysis of digital local studies content in Irish public libraries today.

With this purpose in mind, the objectives of this study are:

1. To provide an overview of the local studies digital content available on the websites of Irish public libraries, including the formats of digital content available.
2. To explore how digital content is created, focusing on the influencing factors and policies.
3. To investigate the views of local studies staff towards digital content, including training needs and perceived impact upon service delivery
4. To discover if and how library 2.0 and web 2.0 features are being used in Irish local studies collections online
5. To explore future developments and issues that may impact upon local studies and digital content in the years ahead.

1.3 Scope and Limitations

The term “local studies”, as used in this study, refers to the collections of local interest material that each public library authority in Ireland holds. Although traditionally associated with the study and collecting of local history, local studies collections also record and preserve a broad range of current-day social, economic and cultural activities (Reid, 2003, p. 25).

This work focuses on local studies content on each local authority library website in the Republic of Ireland. Each library authority in Ireland has a local studies service, with thirty-one in existence as of 1st August 2014. The study does not examine digital local studies content available elsewhere,

such as the National Library of Ireland, the *AskAboutIreland* portal website or on local history websites.

It should also be noted that the *Opportunities for All* national policy calls for a review of current library service organization and sharing of services between authorities (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2013, p. 8). Although local studies libraries are not mentioned directly, an internal planning document circulated to library staff in March of this year suggests that approximately a dozen library authorities may adopt a shared service structure in future (Shared Services Workforce Planning Group for Public Libraries, 2014, p.1). This could have an impact on local studies services in Ireland in the years ahead.

The term ‘digital content’ here refers to all types of digital local studies content in Irish public libraries. Along with and including scanned and digitised content, digital content in this report also includes original local studies content that is in typed out format.

This study also contains some limitations. Firstly, the review of the literature conducted as part of the study is primarily focused on public library local studies services in the United Kingdom and Ireland only. As will be highlighted in the next chapter, there are also limitations with the methodology used. The potential merging of library authorities in the coming years may also result in some of the findings becoming less relevant.

1.4 Structure

The dissertation is structured around six chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the study, providing a background to the research question and the purpose of the project. The aims and objectives are included, while the scope of the dissertation is also highlighted. Limitations of the research project are listed also.

Chapter 2 presents a detailed review of the relevant literature for this topic, beginning with a description of how the literature was searched. The review includes the existing literature on local studies libraries, digital content, Irish local studies collections and digital content; The literature on analyzing and evaluating websites and digital content is also included in this chapter.

The third chapter is a summary of the methodological approaches used for this study. The research design employed is highlighted, along with a summary of the data collection methods used for this study. The advantages and disadvantages of these are also included. The chapter also includes a detailed description of the data analysis used. The chapter concludes by highlighted the ethical considerations that had to be taken into account when undertaking this dissertation.

The fourth chapter presents the results of the research undertaken. It is divided in two. Firstly, it presents the findings from the content analysis of local studies digital content in Irish public libraries. It subsequently presents the findings from the questionnaire circulated to local studies librarians. These are both framed around the objectives of this work. The findings from both data collection methods are presented through the use of tables and diagrams. A summary of the findings is included at the end of the chapter.

Chapter five is a discussion of the finding. This discussion is framed by the five central objectives of the dissertation (section 1.2). It also includes a discussion on the effectiveness of the research methodologies used.

Finally, chapter six is the conclusion chapter. It reviews whether the purpose and objectives of the research question were met. It also suggests some relevant topics for further research.

This chapter has explained the aim and objectives of this dissertation. A background to the study has been included, along with a description of the parameters and limitations of the study. It has shown that the research topic is both timely and relevant. The literature review in the next chapter confirms this.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

A review of the existing literature is a key feature of successful research work. Firstly, such a literature review can demonstrate the research value of a proposal before further research is undertaken. A literature review may also justify the research topic, along with confirming the originality of the research (Hart, 1998). A review often serves another purpose by assisting in the framing of the research questions and methodology to be used also (Hart, 1998; Thomas, 2009).

This chapter presents the results of a review of the existing literature on the topic of digital local studies content and Irish public library websites. It is organised under various themes, as they relate to the overall project and are found in the existing literature. The review begins by examining the literature on local studies services, in order to place the project in context. This is followed by a consideration of the literature on digitisation and local studies collections. Irish public library policies are then considered. It concludes by reviewing the literature on evaluating digital content.

It aims to present a balanced picture of current leading concepts, policies and questions in these areas. The review does not aim to just list the existing literature. Rather, it also aims to critically analyse and synthesise the literature (Thomas, 2009; Pickard, 2013).

2.2 Literature Review Method

Hart states that a search of the literature is useful as it may identify gaps in the existing literature, prevent duplication, assist with the methodology design and may even help avoid errors found in previous research. A good literature search can also help identify the existing work done that is relevant to your project (Hart, 2001, p. 3). The literature search undertaken for this work aimed to achieve all of these.

It was also decided early on that the search would include literature available in a variety of formats including books, journals, official publications and online content. Such diversity broadens the scope of the review. Grey literature items such as theses and conference papers were also sought as these can offer insights into current thinking and research (Hart, 2001).

Certain search limits were included from the start though. The pace of technological change and consequent evolution in the literature in recent years meant that the review mostly used literature produced after the year 2000, particularly in relation to digitisation and website evaluation. It was also decided beforehand to focus on literature produced in the United Kingdom or Ireland, though not exclusively. Only English language literature was consulted. These decisions were taken as it was believed that such literature would be most relevant to the research project. These limits also helped place parameters on the research (Hart, 2001; Pickard, 2013).

The literature search began with broad initial search terms related to the working title of the research project: “digital”, “local studies”, “public library websites” and “website evaluation”. Keyword searches were entered into websites, search engines, library catalogues and databases including:

Google, Facet Publishing, Amazon, Primo, the National Library of Ireland online catalogue, Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) and Library, Information Science and Technology Abstracts (LISTA). It was soon apparent that these general initial search terms would need to be narrowed however, as results from these search terms resulted in a plethora of titles. Many of the returns were irrelevant also. These initial search terms also ignored synonyms such as “digitisation”, “digitise”, “Ireland”, “local history” or “evaluating websites”. Alternative spellings of words such as “digitization” or “digitized” were also being ignored (Pickard, 2013). Keyword combinations of such words, along with heavy use of Boolean logic was consequently utilized in order to enhance the search results (For example, “digit*” covered “digitisation”, “digital” and “digitized”).

Books were also located by physically browsing the library shelf of my local university library. This yielded a number of relevant items that were not picked up on the initial literature search. Journal articles were compiled by entering the narrower search terms highlighted previously into library databases such as LISA & LISTA. Online material, including conference papers, was found through Google searches. Cadair and other websites were searched to find relevant theses available online. Although their focus was different to this work, their bibliographies proved beneficial for finding literature that may have been missed. Bibliographies in all of the above types of literature were similarly searched for further relevant material.

Good housekeeping is crucial to ensuring a successful literature review and project (Hart, 2002). A notebook was used throughout the literature search to record search activities and to note future items to examine. Photocopies of articles, book chapters, conference papers etc. were stored in a ring binder.

Online journals were downloaded to my computer and stored in pdf format. Bookmarks of online literature were added to a favourites folder in my internet browser. Bibliographic details of the literature discovered in the course of the literature search were written down as they were encountered. Brief summaries of the relevance of each item was also created, which included placing them into the relevant theme(s) for the literature review. This ensured that they could be quickly accessed and identified easily when writing up the literature review itself.

When the literature search was complete, an examination of the material discovered was undertaken. The evaluation included a look at the authority, scope, purpose and evidence used by the author(s). This ensured that the quality of the sources were suitable for the project (Pickard, 2013).

The formal literature search for this project was very beneficial. Through the extensive use of Boolean logic, keyword and bibliographies; a substantial selection of literature was examined and evaluated. It proved very beneficial for all sections of the dissertation, including the subsequent literature review and when devising the methodology for the project.

There are weaknesses in the literature search. The search was not exhaustive. As highlighted above, search limits and parameters were included from the outset. Relevant material may have been missed. Very little material on Irish local studies' collections was discovered. In fact, the literature search found no comparable study of digital local studies content in Irish public libraries.

2.3 Review of the Literature

2.3.1 Local Studies Service

A review of the literature for this project on digital local studies content must first examine the existing literature relating to local studies services themselves.

The question has been asked: “What is ‘local studies’?” (Mawe, 2007, p. 3). In the UK, the term ‘local studies’ appears to have been adopted by librarians in the 1970s. Such collections were previously known as local history or local collections. Although it does not neglect the study of the past, the term ‘local studies’ does place more focus on the current-day community (Dewe, 2002a). Such sentiments are repeated by Reid, who argues fervently that ‘local history’ and ‘local studies’ are not the same. He states that “local studies libraries exist in order to recognize the social, economic and cultural activities and achievements of the local community” (2011, p. 1).

Nevertheless, local studies collections are generally seen as holding historical information about a community. Local studies collections also usually focus on the geographic area within the political boundary of a public library authority (Mawe, 2007). This is certainly the case in Ireland, where every public library authority has a centralized local studies section that collect historical, cultural and other information about the relevant area (Government of Ireland, 1998, p. 30). Irish local studies libraries are also generally associated with historical research.

The broad and disparate range of materials found in the collections of local studies departments is well documented in the literature. This is a

consequence of the long-term acquisition of items over many years. Most collections include books, newspapers and periodicals, maps, newspapers, photographs, illustrations, ephemera, audio-visual material and directories (Barber, 2002; Mawe, 2007; Reid & Macafee, 2007). In addition to local history, local studies' collections also cover a diverse range of topics such as family history, archaeology, landscape history, oral history, population studies and economic history (Dewe, 2002).

Local studies' collections offer a diverse range of services and opportunities to their community also. The social impact of local studies within the local community is an example of this. It has been identified as playing a role in social inclusion, in developing social skills and confidence; along with fostering a sense of community identity (Usherwood, 1999; Reid & Macafee, 2007). Many local studies libraries undertake extensive outreach activities, including educational workshops (Barber (b), 2002; Sharp, 2009). The quantity and quality of research and "investigations" undertaken by users of local studies, including published work, is another aspect of the services that local studies help provide (Reid & Macafee, 2007).

Such diverse content and wide-ranging activities results in local studies libraries being accessed by a wide range of users. Local historians, family historians, teachers and school children, archaeologists, tourists and those with commercial interests are examples of such diversity. Many users travel from outside the region to use local studies collections also. These libraries also attract people from a range of age groups, although there is evidence that local studies is particularly attractive to older adults (Mawe, 2007). Their commitment to their subject and or locality has led to users of local

studies being described as “the engine of local studies” (Reid & Macafee, 2007, p. 131).

This review of the literature relating to local studies has highlighted the traditional services offered by local studies libraries, including in Ireland. This places the role of local studies libraries today in context. The three pillars of local studies have been documented: the collections, the users and the investigations that local studies libraries help promote. It is claimed that together they form a “tripartite paradigm” framework for local studies (Reid & Macafee, 2007).

Local studies services also have weaknesses and face threats however. The most obvious threat is that of finance, through reduction of budgets or staffing numbers (Melrose, 2002; Sharp, 2009). Barber claims that local studies may be seen as a back-room “Cinderella service” in many local authorities (Barber, 2002, p. 140). The literature makes clear that local studies needs to constantly assess, plan ahead and adapt to situations if it is to remain relevant and successful (Barber, 2002; Dewe, 2002; Melrose, 2002; Sharp, 2009).

The literature, as outlined above, reveals much about local studies collections, users and services. This proved useful when deciding upon the research methods for this work (as described in the next chapter). It should also be noted that there is a paucity of literature on Irish local studies libraries.

2.3.2 Digital Content

The internet and subsequent expansion in digital content has resulted in new challenges and opportunities for local studies libraries (Dewe, 2002; Barber, 2002; Smith & Rowley, 2012). The literature is strongly in favour of libraries adding digital content, including local studies content, to their websites (Barry & Tedd, 2008; Deegan & Tanner, 2002; Hughes, 2004; Jordan, 2006; Reid, 2002; Smith & Rowley, 2012;). It has even been recommended that local studies should adopt a new philosophy, to take into account the context of the digital age (Reid & Macafee, 2012).

The literature on digital content and libraries is very strong. Increased access to library collections through digitisation is the most frequently cited reason for the support for increased digitisation by local studies services. Digital content can be accessed at all times from any location with an internet connection. This is a huge improvement from traditional local studies services which have limited opening hours and only one location (Deegan and Tanner, 2002; Hume and Lock, 2002; Hughes, 2004; Smith and Rowley, 2012). This also helps in the promotion of the collections and services of each local studies library. The opportunities that digital content offer to local studies is also often emphasised. Reid argues that digitisation will permit local studies collections to widen access and showcase the diversity of their collections and services to the world, thus ending the “myth of parochialism” occasionally associated with local studies (Reid, 2003, p. 25).

Improved preservation and conservation of valuable local studies material is another reason given for adding digital content to library websites (Astle & Muir, 2002; Smith & Rowley, 2012). Digital content also offers enhanced search capabilities, including browsing and keyword searches of the

metadata (Tedd & Large, 2005; Jordan, 2006). It can also be used to promote outreach and educational activities, including integrating local studies material into the school curriculum (Deegan & Tanner, 2002; Hughes, 2004). The addition of digital content to library websites also meets the needs of users, potential users and even non-users. This is a crucial factor for libraries.

Disadvantages in adding digital content is also highlighted in the literature. The demand for resources (including finance and time) and the need to plan for digital preservation are two examples (Ridyard, 2001; Reid & Macafee, 2007). Concern over copyright is another legitimate issue that appears in the literature. This can prove to be very time-consuming and costly for library staff already under pressure (Hume & Lock, 2002; Hughes, 2004; Jones, 2008;). Adding digital content also requires a commitment to provide staff with training. Lack of training can have a serious impact on the quality of service provision (Barber, 2007; Nashwalder, 2013; Vrana, 2011). These issues raised by the literature need to be considered when drawing up the methodology for this report.

Examples of literature available on the digitisation of local studies content in other countries were consulted also. Vrana's study of digitisation projects in Croatian public libraries discovered that only a modest number engaged in digitisation projects. Lack of finance and staff training are the main reasons given (Vrana, 2011). The impact of digital resources on the Northern Ireland library network is explored briefly in another survey (Hirst, 2003). Developments in Wales in recent years are highlighted in a couple of studies. Jones documents how digitisation can be adopted as a core function and highlights some of the lessons learned (2008). Tedd also provides an

overview of the People's Collection Wales project, whereby convergence between libraries, archives, museums and others has resulted in the creation of additional digital collections (Tedd, 2011). The impact of digital content on the delivery of services is an area where there is further scope for research (Smith & Rowley, 2012, p. 274). Nashwalder's study of the role of public libraries in delivering local studies services also highlights the need to investigate the impact of digital content on staff training requirements (2013, p. 98). The potential of social media is also highlighted (Theimer, 2010).

An interesting finding from Mawe's 2007 evaluation of local studies websites in the United Kingdom is that 55% of the local studies collection websites surveyed did not provide access to digitised material (Mawe, 2007, p. 52). It would be interesting to compare this figure with Irish local studies websites today.

2.3.3 Digital Content in Irish Local Studies Libraries

The seminal 1998 Government review of the Irish public library service, *Branching Out*, recommended that a large-scale programme of digitisation of local studies material be undertaken by Irish local studies libraries. In 2003, the national *Our Cultural Heritage* report was published, which reported on pilot projects undertaken since *Branching Out* and suggested a national portal website be created. This report also recommended that a national digitisation strategy be set up. The strategy, *Changing Libraries*, was launched in 2005 (McDermott, 2008, p. 23).

The portal website, *AskAboutIreland* (www.askaboutireland.ie), is the focal point of the digitisation programme. Local studies services from across Ireland have contributed digital content to this website, as a means of

promoting their collections. The website also facilitates access to free online digital content including the Griffith's Valuation census substitute, JSTOR, Irish Newspaper Archives and digitised Ordnance Survey maps (An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, 2003; Government of Ireland, 1998; McDermott, 2008; Barry & Tedd, 2008). The most recent national library strategy, *Opportunities for All*, calls for the continuation of the digitisation of local studies material. It also recommends that the Changing Libraries strategy be continued, "to ensure that Irish public libraries exploit best practice in relation to technological developments and digital resource provision" (2013, p. 40).

Excluding official publications, there is a paucity of published literature relating to Irish digital content and local studies. This is remarked upon by Barry & Tedd (2007), whose article investigates how Irish public libraries use their websites to present their local studies online, evaluating them under criteria such as authority, currency, usability, branding and design. It also looked into the adoption of Library 2.0 tools by Irish local studies libraries (Barry & Tedd, 2007). Their research does not however, offer a deeper analysis of the formats, extent or variation of digital local studies content available on Irish local studies websites. This lack of a body of research on Irish digital local studies content underlines the need for a study on how Irish public libraries are creating and presenting their digital local studies content.

2.3.4 Literature on Evaluation of Library Websites

An effective literature review should also contribute towards the methodology and research design of your own project (Pickard, 2013; Hart,

1998). Although the quantity of literature available on evaluating local studies websites is limited, there are still some insights to be found in the methodology used in the literature referred to previously.

Barry and Tedd's study of Irish local studies websites includes a useful checklist of fifty criteria to evaluate all websites of Irish public library local studies services. The checklist is derived from criteria developed by others. (Barry & Tedd, 2007, p. 165). Their criteria for evaluating local studies websites is divided into seven basic themes, the first six of whom have previously been used for evaluating both print and electronic sources (Barry & Tedd, 2007, p. 165; Cooke, 2001, p. 8).

The themes are:

1. First impressions.
2. Content and coverage.
3. Authority.
4. Currency and maintenance.
5. Design and multimedia.
6. Accessibility and navigation.
7. Sources and services for local studies on the website.

The fifty criteria used for evaluation by Barry and Tedd are certainly transferable to other website evaluations. They point out however that such criteria are not ideal for evaluating the quality and depth of the websites. Crucially, a bad website with good digitised content would be equated with a good website with little digital content. This limitation in the existing

literature on evaluation was important when creating the methodology for this project (as outlined in the next chapter).

Barry and Tedd also used detailed analytical descriptions for four of the best-ranking websites, along with semi-structured interviews with other librarians. The analytical descriptions research method used appears to be flawed, as it only accounts for four of the highest-ranking websites, rather than a comparison of all websites

Smith and Rowley also make use of website analysis as the first step for their study of digitisation in the context of public library local studies services. They use forty evaluative criteria, primarily based on that used by Barry and Tedd. Smith and Rowley's main methodology was semi-structured interviews however. This proved satisfactory for the purposes of their study. Vrana's survey of Croatian public libraries digital content also contains a useful list of seventeen questions that were included in a web survey sent to librarians. Many of these questions are transferable an alternative questionnaire on public library websites (Vrana, 2011).

Evaluative criteria for local studies collections are found elsewhere in the literature also. Cooke's work on evaluating sources provides step by step examples on how to evaluate information sources, including websites (Cooke, 2001, pp. 97-103). It also includes criteria on evaluating image-based and multimedia sources, which is relevant to this project (pp. 139-144). Cooke also includes a handy compilation of evaluation checklists that was informative for this project (pp. 178-193).

Reid also includes a list of criteria most suitable for local studies digital collections. This has been created under the following headings: localness, originality, contribution, authority, level, integrity, effectiveness and support

(Reid, 2003, 217-225). Such criteria was taken into consideration when drawing up the research methods in the next chapter.

2.4 Summary

This chapter has presented the results of a review of the literature identified as being relevant to the objectives of this study. The chapter began with a detailed summary of the methods used to find relevant literature, along with the methods used to locate and store the discovered material. A review of the literature on local studies services including their collections and users then followed (2.3.1). This helped provide an insight into some of the issues facing local studies, including weaknesses and threats.

The review continued by synthesizing the extensive literature on the impact and role of digital content on local studies (2.3.2). The perceived advantages and disadvantages of digitisation were summarized, as they appear in the literature. The paucity of literature on Irish local studies services and digital content was highlighted through the review (2.3.3). This underlined that this proposed study on digital content in Irish public libraries is under-represented in the literature.

The final part of the chapter (2.3.4) provided a valuable insight into evaluating library websites. The literature also highlights the methods used in previous studies of digital local studies content in other countries. This literature would prove very valuable when designing data collection methods for this study in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the methodological approach used for this research project. The research methods used are also highlighted, including a discussion of their strengths and limitations. Ethical considerations for this study are also highlighted.

3.2 Research Design

After reviewing the literature and the aims and objectives of this research proposal, it was decided to use a mixed methods research design. The project deliberately combined different research methods as a strategy for achieving the research objectives (Denscombe, 2010, pp. 137-139).

Firstly, the quantitative research approach uses formal instruments such as surveys, believes in the objective reality of social facts and reduces the data to numerical indices (Clayton & Gorman, 2005, p.9). This is appropriate for this project as it aims to discover the current state of digital content on Irish local studies websites (Mawe, 2007, p. 25; Pickard, 2013, p. 18). The quantitative research design helped achieve these research objectives.

A qualitative research approach was also included. This type of research design facilitates increased complexity between the variables, is more descriptive and more understanding of participant perspectives (Clayton & Gorman, 2005, p. 9). This is also suitable for this dissertation as it encouraged useful feedback and data from participants in the survey. The

research objectives relating to obtaining the views of staff on digital content training and their impact on service delivery would be enhanced by the inclusion of a qualitative research method. The mixed methods research design utilised in this research project are a product of the research objectives.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Two data collection methods were utilised for this dissertation: i) Content analysis of the local studies websites and ii) self-administered questionnaires.

3.3.1 Content Analysis

As highlighted in the previous chapter, a variety of methods have been used in previous studies to evaluate local studies websites (2.3.4). Evaluation checklists with forty to fifty different criteria each are used in a couple of studies (Barry & Tedd, 2007; Smith & Rowley, 2012). The advantage of this method is that it allows clear positive or negative answers to a whole series of questions. It is not ideal for comparing content, as required for this study however (Mawe, 2007, p. 29). Using the literature, it was decided to use content analysis of the local studies websites as one quantitative method of data collection for this study.

Content analysis can be used as a method of quantifying the contents of any text, including writing, sounds or pictures (Denscombe, p. 281). A coding scheme is drawn up, which ensures that the content can be quantified using pre-determined categories in a systematic and replicable manner. It is also a

very flexible method, which can be applied to a variety of different media (Bryman, 2012, p. 289, p. 299). It is therefore ideal for this study of digital local studies in Irish public libraries.

Existing literature on evaluating information services and local studies websites was consulted when drawing up the categories and coding manual for the content analysis (Barry and Tedd, 2007; Cooke, 2001; Mawe, 2007; Rowley and Smith, 2012). Cooke's criteria for evaluating image-based and multimedia sources was particularly useful (Cooke, pp. 144-145). The criteria for evaluating local studies sources, compiled by Reid, was also considered when creating the criteria for the content analysis here (Reid, 2003, p. 217).

The manual for this dissertation consisted of twenty-two relevant categories divided in two, with a coding system applied to each category. The manual and evaluation codes are included in appendix two. This manual was greatly influenced by the existing literature on local studies and digital content (discussed in chapter two).

Therefore, the first part of the manual related to each library website and the features of the digital content. Relevant headings derived from the literature review on digital content and evaluating websites (such as currency, external links, searching facilities, homepage etc.) were included.

The second part of the coding manual focuses on the various formats and features of the digital content. This part was influenced most by the existing literature on local studies services and their collections, as discussed in the previous chapter. Each library website was evaluated under a number of headings, primarily related to the formats of the digital local studies content (e.g. photographs, maps, educational content etc.).

This evaluative criteria were first pilot-tested on three local studies websites in the UK. These were randomly chosen from the list of local studies websites taken from the CILIP website (www.cilip.org.uk). This pilot study was undertaken to ensure that the evaluative criteria used suited the research aims of the study. Some minor amendments were made, such as the types of formats to be evaluated and a reduction in the number of categories.

All thirty-one Irish local studies libraries were evaluated using this data collection method. The website address of each was located through Google searches and are included in appendix 1 of this report. The content analysis evaluation took place over a one week period, in order to ensure that the survey was as consistent as possible and that the population was examined in a narrow timeframe.

Some of the advantages of this data collection technique have already been outlined above. It is very quantifiable, transparent and suitable for replication. The data received from the content analysis also helped assist in compiling questions for the questionnaire used later as a data collection method. This flexibility is very beneficial (Bryman, 2012, p. 304).

Website content analysis has disadvantages also. Websites constantly change and are updated. The analysis is therefore based on some websites that may have already been altered. New approaches to evaluating websites, including local studies websites, are constantly being developed (Bryman, 2012, p.65). The lack of digital content on some Irish local studies websites was another negative, as it made it more difficult to obtain substantial data. Another disadvantage of the content analysis method is that it is very difficult to avoid interpretation by the coder, which can result in subjectivity (Bryman, 2012, p. 306).

3.3.2 Questionnaire

The second data collection method employed in this dissertation was a self-administered questionnaire. This method also features in the literature on digital local studies content and public libraries (Astle and Muir, 2002; Vrana, 2011).

The questionnaire included questions in both open and closed format. Scaling was also used for some questions, as a means of obtaining data.

The closed questions were most useful for obtaining unambiguous quantifiable answers (data) to certain questions. The open questions in the survey were used for answering questions that required longer answers or questions that necessitated a wide range of potential answers. All questions included aimed to create data and generate findings relevant to the overall research aim and objectives.

The existing literature was mined extensively for advice, suggestions and guidelines for designing and administering self-administered questionnaires (Bell, 2010, pp. 140-157; Bryman, 2012, pp. 232-244; Denscombe, 2012, pp. 160-166; Pickard, 2013, pp. 208-213;). A list of potential questions was first developed, which were subsequently evaluated and revised until a pilot questionnaire was ready (Pickard, 2013, p. 208). This pilot survey was then circulated to a number of staff members in my own local authority, including the local studies librarian. This proved valuable for testing how long it took participants to complete, whether the questions were unsuitable or ambiguous and whether the layout of the questionnaire was clear (Bell, 2010, p. 151; Bryman, p. 263).

The questionnaire was then amended where necessary, with several additional questions included and the wording of others amended. The

option for respondents to answer through an online survey was added at this stage. The questions included were in both open and closed format. The questionnaire included a total of twenty-eight questions, divided into four parts:

- i) Digital local studies content in your authority
- ii) Service delivery and use of social media
- iii) Staff and training
- iv) National policy

Again, the final version of the questionnaire was much influenced by the findings from the literature review and the research objectives of this work. This questionnaire is included as appendix three.

Where the email address of the local studies librarian was not apparent from the authority website, a phone call was made to each library authority to introduce the research project and to politely ask permission for a response. The email address to contact the local studies librarian with was obtained in this manner. This phone call also proved very useful in engaging the potential respondents.

The finalized questionnaire was then emailed to the email address of all thirty-one public library local studies services in Ireland, addressed to the local studies librarian. The email itself included a note of introduction to the research. This provided background information to the potential respondent about the questionnaire and the research. It outlined the purpose of the questionnaire, under whose auspices is the research being undertaken,

assured confidentiality and provided full contact details (Bryman, 2012, p. 236; Denscombe, p. 160; Pickard, 2013, p. 209).

An online survey was created through the www.surveymonkey.com website. This was created following feedback from the pilot survey. The questionnaire was also attached in Microsoft Word 97-2003 format, as not every local studies service may have the latest Microsoft format or access to the online survey website. Reminder emails were sent out to those who did not respond two weeks later, which proved successful in gaining additional responses.

The advantage of this data collection method is that it allowed for a full sample of all Irish local studies librarians to be approached quickly and cheaply. It also provides standardized quantifiable data. There was also an absence of ‘the interviewer effects’ that may distort the survey (Astle & Muir, 2002; Bryman, 2012, p. 249; Pickard, 2013, p. 207).

Disadvantages of this method include the notorious low response rate that often accompanies self-completion questionnaires. It also does not allow for additional probing and some questions can be confusing or not receive adequate answers due to poor design. This is why good question design and pilot surveys are so important.

3.4 Data Analysis

As highlighted in 3.3.1 above, the content analysis data was obtained using specific evaluation criteria. Each local authority received a score under the various headings in the coding manual. This evaluation was done over an one week period, to ensure all thirty-one library websites received fair

treatment. This quantifiable data was then recorded in an Excel worksheet, with the data results from each local studies library being recorded individually. The final data was then gathered together and presented under various themes and headings for clarity purposes. Bar charts, graphs and pie charts were included for the same reasons. These findings are included in chapter 4.

Four authorities responded to the questionnaire by Word, highlighting the need to include this option for potential respondents. The remainder directly filled in the online survey. Data from the former four respondents was subsequently manually added to the online survey by the researcher as this made it much easier to obtain clear data. Data from the closed questions was quantifiable. The functions included in the online survey package were used to generate percentage breakdowns, charts and graphs for presentation purposes (included in the findings in the next chapter).

The qualitative data from the questionnaires (from the open questions) was analysed through several methods. Firstly, certain keywords were identified in some questions. The keywords were subsequently converted into quantifiable data for presenting the findings. Other qualitative data was quoted in the text, as it represented the views of several librarians to specific questions.

The results of the data analysis were then written up, with the original research objectives helping frame how the data was presented in chapter 4.

3.5 Limitations

This dissertation has several limitations. As the website content analysis was undertaken in early August, it was felt necessary to email out the questionnaires around the same time. This was undertaken as a means of enabling a higher response rate to the questionnaire, with the month of August traditionally a popular time for taking annual leave. It was feared that otherwise some local studies librarians may not have received the questionnaire due to being on holidays.

This meant that the two data collection methods overlapped somewhat. The survey was circulated at the same time that the content analysis was being completed, but prior to the data from the analysis being finalized. The questionnaire would have benefited if the findings from the content analysis were known.

Interviews with local studies librarians or relevant stakeholders would have enhanced the research project also (Barry & Tedd, 2008; Smith & Rowley, 2012). As discussed in the previous chapter, this data collection method has been utilised in previous studies on local studies libraries.

The research methods used also had limitations. Although a very good response rate was received to the questionnaire (outlined in the next chapter), it did not receive a full response rate which lessens its validity somewhat. Another limitation with the survey, is that a small number of Irish local studies libraries have no digital content online at all. This meant that the usable data from the content analysis for these was sparse.

Another limitation with the study is that the planned merging of local studies services over the coming years (as discussed in chapter 1) means that some of the data obtained will be soon obsolete.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The importance of ethical considerations when undertaking research is well-documented throughout the literature (Bell, 2010, pp. 44-60; Denscombe, pp. 329-342; Pickard, pp. 87-96;). Ethical considerations also formed an integral part throughout this dissertation also.

This study is designed to adhere to the following ethical procedures and guidelines

- Department of Information Studies (DIS) Aberystwyth Ethics Policy For Research
- British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice
- CILIP Ethical Principals / Code of Professional Practice

When circulating the questionnaire by email, an informed consent form was attached with the questionnaire for each participant to fill out also (Pickard, 2013, p. 90). A blank copy of this informed consent form is included in appendix three. Each participant was also assured in the introduction to the email that the questionnaire was exclusively for the purposes of research and that no individual library service would be identifiable through the responses given to the questionnaire. It was important to ensure that all respondents felt that they could answer the questionnaire honestly and openly. Potential respondents were also informed that all data would be disposed of when the study is completed.

The author also had exclusive access to all notes, data and material generated from the questionnaire. It was stored on a password-protected laptop for the duration of the project only. All relevant material was subsequently deleted at the end of the study.

3.7 Methods Summary

This chapter has outlined the research methods used by the researcher for this dissertation. Following the literature review and examining the aims and objectives of the study, it was decided to use a mixed methods research design. Similarly, two data collection methods were used.

A website content analysis was used as the first method of obtaining data. A coding manual with twenty-two relevant categories was created (included as appendix two). After being pilot-tested, this analysis was used to evaluate local studies digital content available on the websites of all thirty-one Irish library authorities. The advantages and disadvantages of this data collection method are also included in the chapter. The second data collection method used was a questionnaire on digital local studies content, circulated by email to all local studies librarians. Both open and closed questions were included, which created both quantitative and qualitative data. The questions drawn up were influenced by the literature and the research objectives.

This chapter also described how the extensive data was analysed, along with highlighting the limitations of the research methodology used. Ethical considerations and practices were also summarized.

After the research methodology was finalized and subsequently put into practice, a large quantity of data was generated. This data is discussed in the findings in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this research project. It is divided into two sections. Firstly, the findings from the website content analysis are presented. This section is organised under the coding schedule criteria as outlined in appendix two. Later in the chapter, the findings from the questionnaire distributed to local studies librarians are listed. The chapter concludes with a summary of the principal findings from this report.

4.2 Findings from the Website Content Analysis

The findings from the website content analysis fulfill a key objective of this dissertation by providing an overview of the local studies digital content available on the websites of Irish public libraries, including the formats of digital content available.

4.2.1 Homepage of Library Website

An examination of the homepage of every public library authority website found that all 31 public library authorities include information on the local studies service on the homepage of the library authority website. Digital local studies content featured on the homepage of 7/31 (23%) library authorities. The remaining 24/31 (77%) provide a clearly identifiable link to the local studies service on their homepage.

4.2.2 External Links To Digital Local Studies Content

Each website was analysed to discover whether links to external digital local studies content was included. The extent of the external links included was also recorded (Figure 1).

Two websites (2/31, 6%) did not include any links at all, while 17/31 (55%) included a comprehensive list of external sites with relevant local studies digital content.

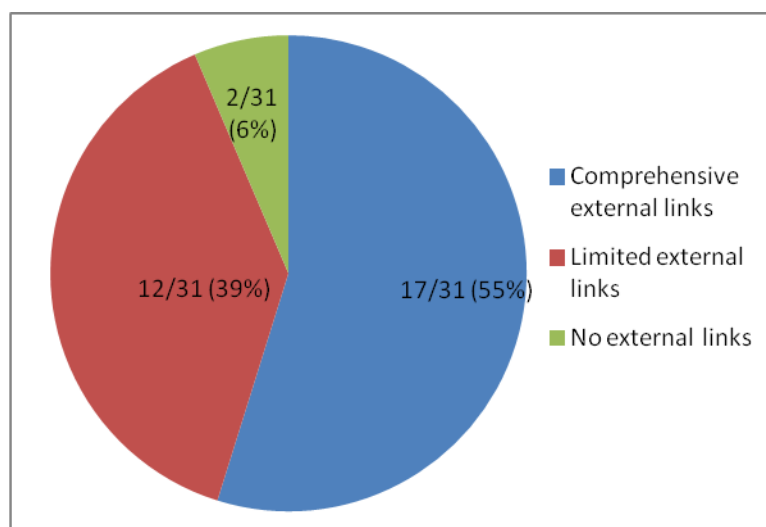


Figure 1: Summary of Provision of External Links

4.2.3 Evidence of requests for donations of material to be added to website as digital content

Only 3 out of 31 (10%) library service websites explicitly requested donations of items to be converted and displayed in digital format at a later date. 28/31 (90%) did not.

4.2.4 Extent of Digital Local Studies Content in Irish Public Libraries

This criterion looked at how Irish libraries are presenting digital local studies content online. Each website was examined to see whether there was digital

local studies content available. Websites with digital local studies content were scrutinized to see whether their collection was only a sample collection or a more comprehensive selection of digital content.

The findings (Figure 2) are that:

- 8/31(26%) library authorities do not have any digital local studies content
- 4/31 (13%) have created a website or online repository exclusively for digital local studies content
- 8/31 (26%) have a comprehensive collection of digital local studies content
- The remaining 11/31 (35%) have at least a sample collection online.

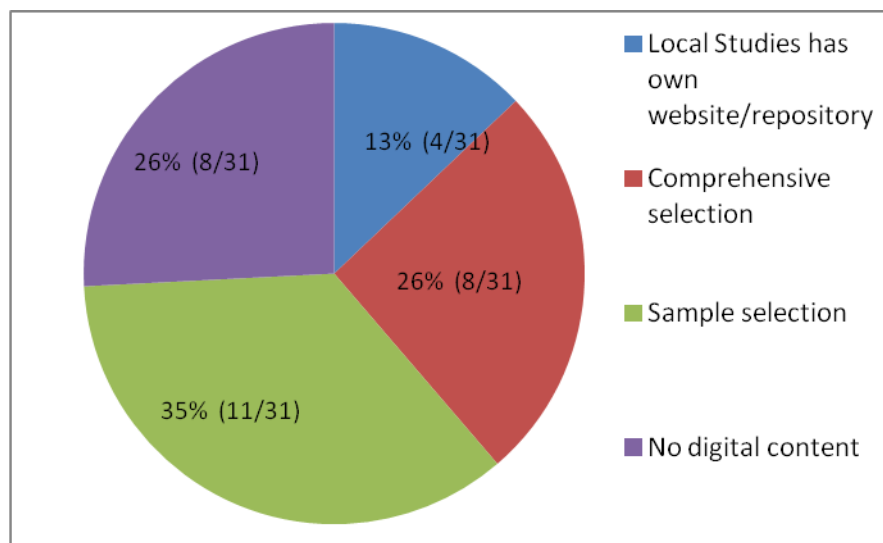


Figure 2: Breakdown of extent of digital local studies content in Irish public libraries

As highlighted above, 8/31 (26%) library authorities do not have any digital local studies content at all on their website. Although each of these authorities had information on their local studies service up online (e.g. contact details, summary of the collection, opening hours etc.), the absence

of digital local studies content meant that these 8 library authorities were subsequently precluded from the remaining coding criteria. This left 23 library authorities to be examined under the remaining criteria detailed in the remainder of section 4.2 of this report.

4.2.5 Library Catalogue

All 23 library authorities with online content were found to include local studies items in the online public access catalogue (OPAC). Books and journals were the most common formats that were searchable. Digital local studies content was discovered in the OPAC of 4/23 (17%) library authorities.

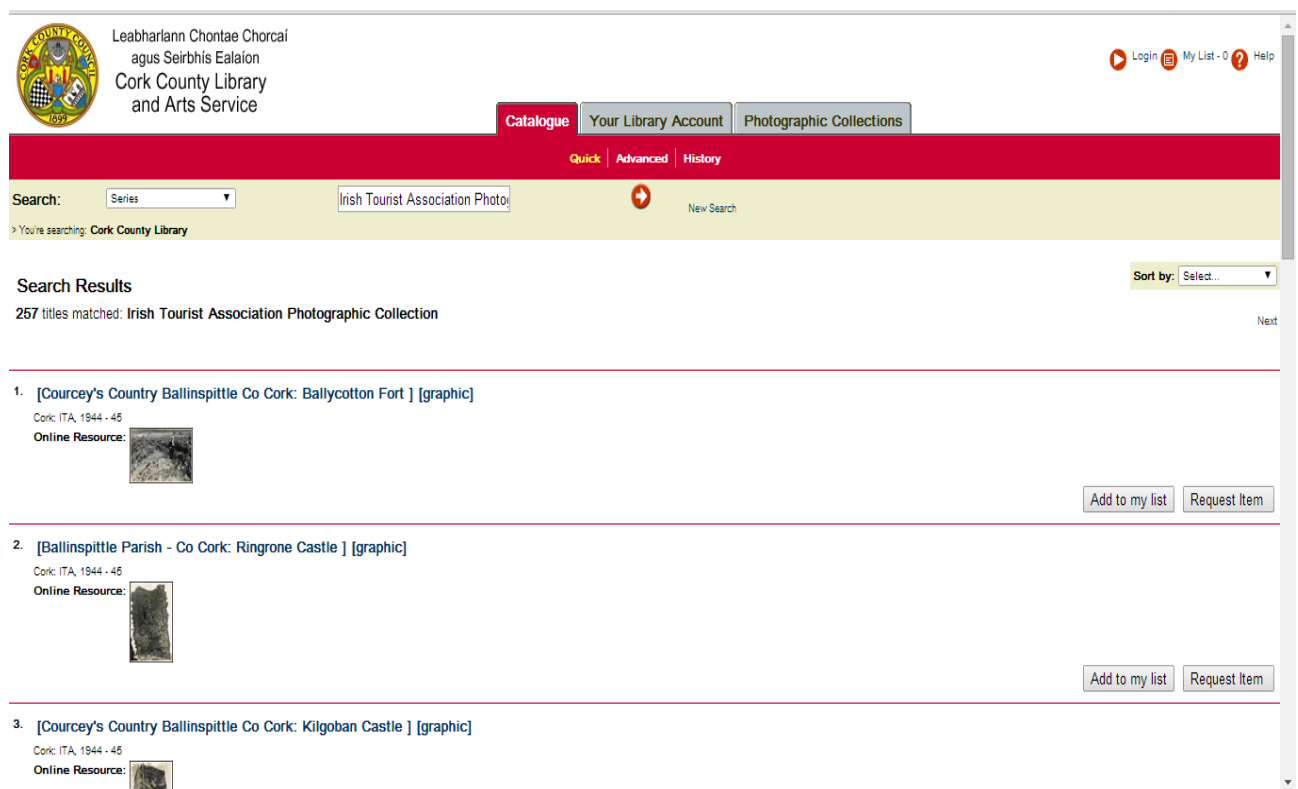


Figure 3: Example of digital local studies content available on library catalogue (Cork County Library and Arts Service)

4.2.6 Currency of Digital Local Studies Content

This criteria examined whether local studies websites informed their users of when the digital content was created and or added to the website.

- 5/23 (22%) of websites included updates of new digital local studies content
- 4/23 (17%) included dates for when some local studies content was created and or added
- The remaining 14/23 (61%) did not display have any dates for when the digital local studies content was created.

4.2.7 Searching and Browsing of Digital Local Studies Content

This criterion aimed to establish whether local studies websites are offering users the possibility of searching and browsing through digital local studies content. It found (Figure 4) that 5/23 (22%) of authorities digital content was fully searchable. A further 4 (17%) permitted partial searching of some of their digital content. 7/23 (30%) authorities facilitated only browsing through the digital content on their site. The remaining 7 (30%) did not permit any browsing or searching of digital content.

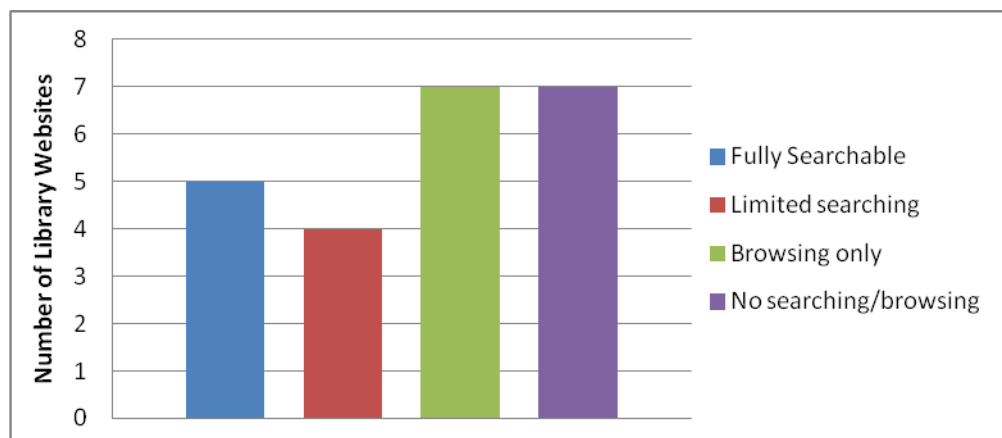


Figure 4: Searching and Browsing of Digital Local Studies Content

4.2.8 Copyright Notice

Websites with digital local studies content were checked for examples of copyright information. The findings were that:

- 7/23 (30%) of library authorities include extensive copyright information for local studies digital content on their website.
- A further 4/23 (17%) include limited copyright information with some but not all of their digital content.
- There was no information on copyright on 1/23 (4%) websites.

4.2.9 Metadata

The use of metadata across the 23 library authorities with digital content online was also scrutinized (Table 1). Full metadata standards (such as Dublin Core) are found on only 2/23 (9%). 8/23 (35%) did not have any metadata at all, though this figures includes websites that did not include formats that require metadata (e.g. a typed out article from a historical journal).

Metadata	
Use of metadata standards	2/23 (9%)
Limited metadata included	13/23 (57%)
No evidence of metadata on website	8/23 (35%)

Table 1:

Metadata

in Irish public libraries

4.2.10 Web 2.0

Another criteria examined was the use of web 2.0 features to highlight their digital content (Table 2).

4/23 authorities (17%) have their own social media sites, with FLICKR particularly popular for sharing digital images from their collection. Furthermore, 8/23 (35%) use their library service web 2.0 site(s) to display local studies digital content. 2/23 (6%) local studies services had their own library blog with digital local studies content included, while 2 more included digital local studies content on the library service blog.

Use of Web 2.0 / Social Media For Digital Local Studies Content	
Local studies has own social media account(s) / web 2.0 feature which includes digital content	5/23 (22%)
Digital local studies content added to the social media accounts of library service	8/23 (35%)
No evidence of use of social media or web 2.0 features for digital local studies content	10/23 (43%)



Table 2: Use of Web 2.0 / Social Media for Digital Local Studies Content

4.2.11 Library 2.0

The use (or non-use) of library 2.0 features was also noted. Examples of library 2.0 features were found in 4 library service websites (17%), with 19 (83%) not displaying any library 2.0 features.




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Close Window

Number : 0001188 **Title :** Lismore, County Waterford. Lismore hockey club

Description :

Photographer/Artist : Stokes, Margaret 1905-

Image Date : Circa 1930

 [Printer Friendly Version](#)
[Copyright Information](#)

Figure 5: Example of library 2.0 features on left hand side (© Waterford Co. Council Library and/or Respective Owners)

4.2.12 Creator of Digital Content

8/23 (35%) of authorities list library staff as the creators. 9/23 (39%) have a combination of library staff and others as the creators of the content.

Just 1/23 library service (4%) includes another group/individual as the creator of their digital content. No name for the creator of digital content is given in 5/23 (22%) of authorities

4.2.13 Digital Content in Typed Out Format

Digital content on local studies websites is not always original scanned and subsequently digitised material. It can also include local studies content typed up onto a website or content in pdf/Word format etc. It was found (Figure 6) that 18/23 (78%) of the websites had digital content in this format. The remaining 5/23 (22%) did not.

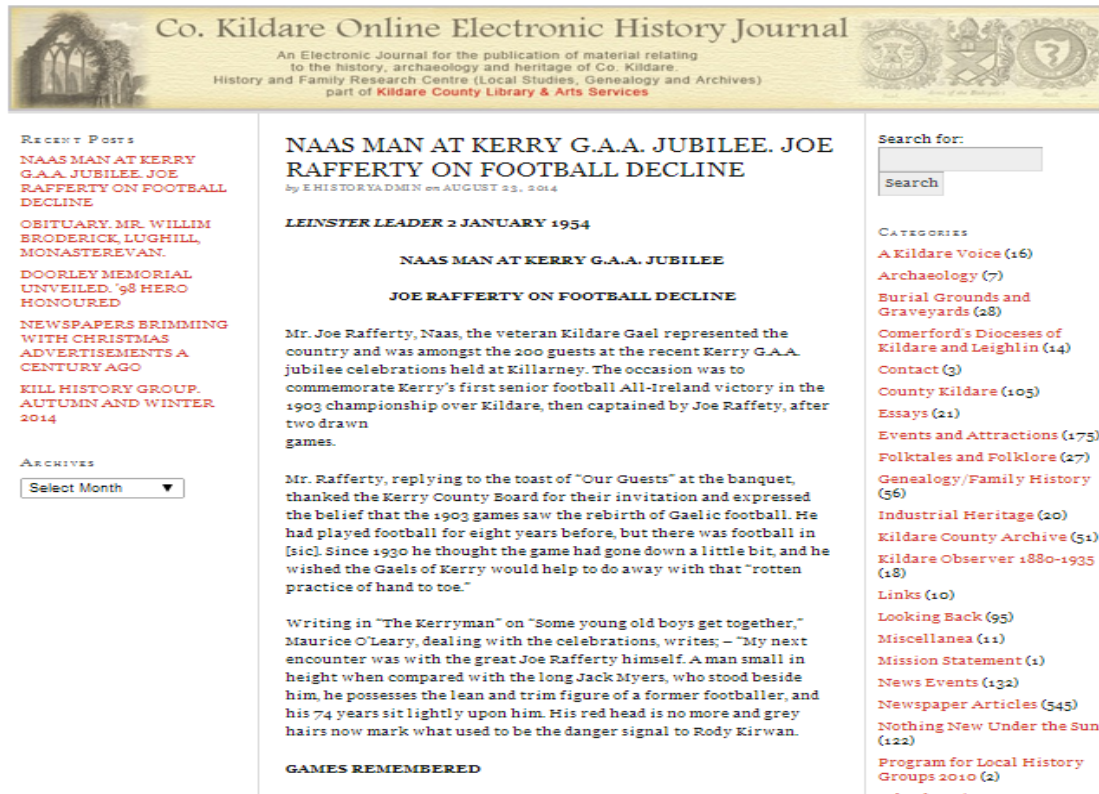


Figure 6: Screenshot from E-History Journal of Kildare Library and Arts Service

4.2.14 Audio-Visual Material

8/23 (35%) of the library authorities with digital content had material in audio-visual format (Figure 7) The other 15 (65%) did not. 7 of the 8 included audio content, while 4 authorities had video content only up online.

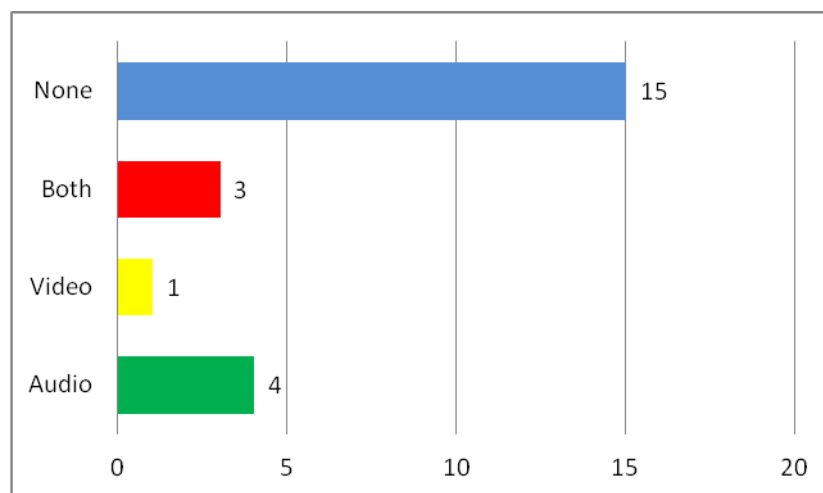


Figure 7: Audio-Visual Content

4.2.15 Books and Journals in Digital Format

- 12/23 (52%) of websites had digital content in books/journals format (Figure 8)
- 9/23 (39%) had content from books/journals in digital format.
- One authority (4%) had an index only up online.
- 11/23 (%) did not have any such content.

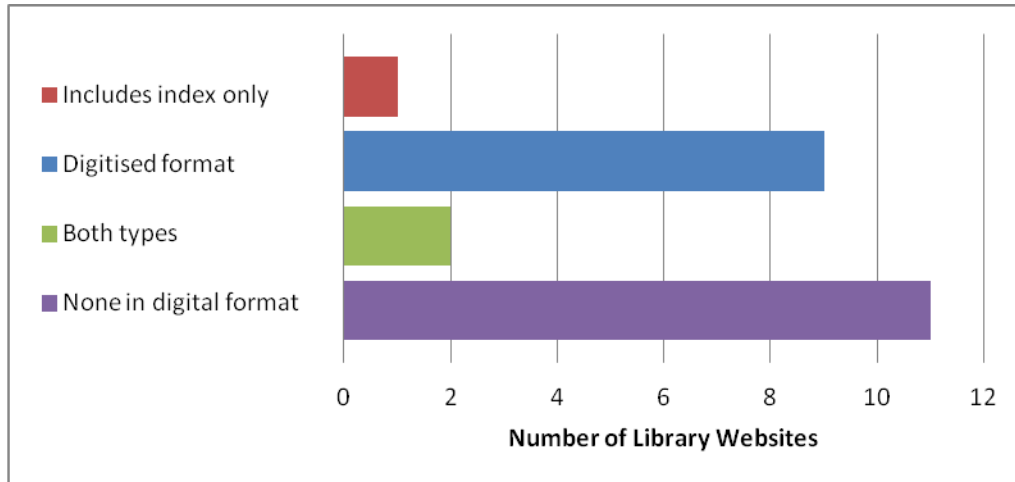


Figure 8: Digital Content Available From Books/Journals

4.2.16 Ephemera and Manuscript Material

The content analysis (Table 3) found that 11/23 websites (48%) had some digital content in either ephemera or manuscript format. 4/23 (17%) had ephemera only, while 2/23 (9%) had only added manuscript material in digital format.

Ephemera And Manuscript Material	
Ephemera in digital format	4/23 (17%)
Manuscript material in digital format	2/23 (9%)
Both ephemera and manuscript content up online	5/23 (22%)
Neither format added to website	12/23 (52%)

Table 3: Ephemera and Manuscripts in digital format

4.2.17 Maps

The content analysis also examined the extent to which maps have been added to the websites of Irish public libraries. It found that:

- 11/23 library services (48%) had at least some maps up online in digital format
- 12/23 library authorities (52%) did not have any maps in digital format.

4.2.18 Newspapers

An examination of newspaper content in digital format available in Irish public library websites was also undertaken (Figure 9). It found that:

- 4/23 library authorities (17%) have added a selection of digitised historical newspapers to their website.
- 1/23 (4%) had added an index to their website.

- A majority of websites (16/23 or 70%) have no newspaper content available in digital format on their website however.

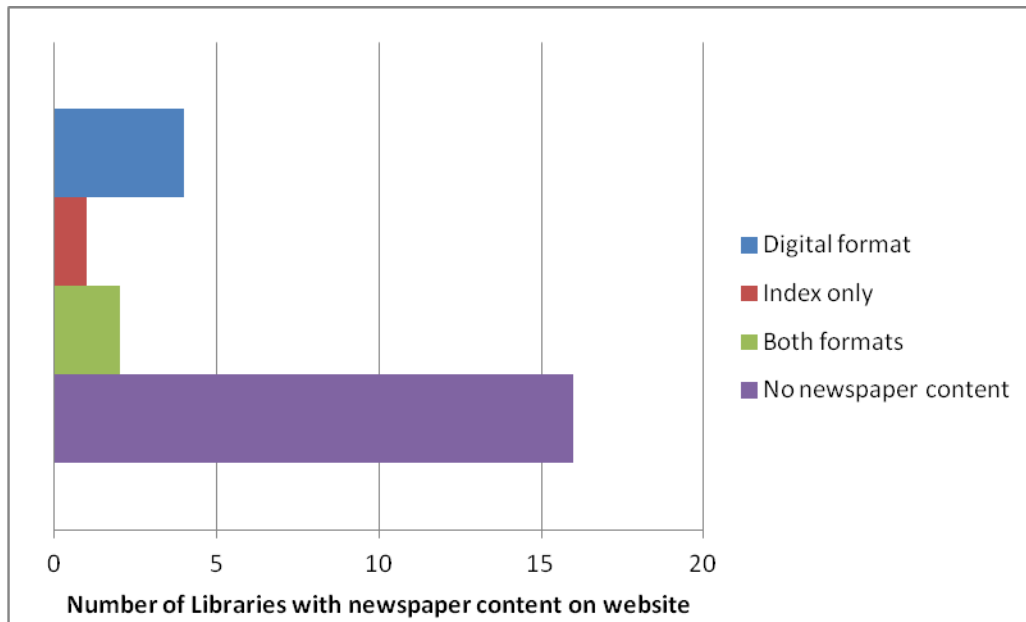


Figure 9: Newspaper content in digital format

4.2.19 Photographs

Photographs are a common format of digital content. The findings (Figure 10) in relation to Irish local studies online collections are that:

- 6/23 (26%) of websites had a comprehensive photographic collection
- 8 more library websites (35%) had a sample collection
- 9/23 of the authorities (39%) did not have any photographs up online.

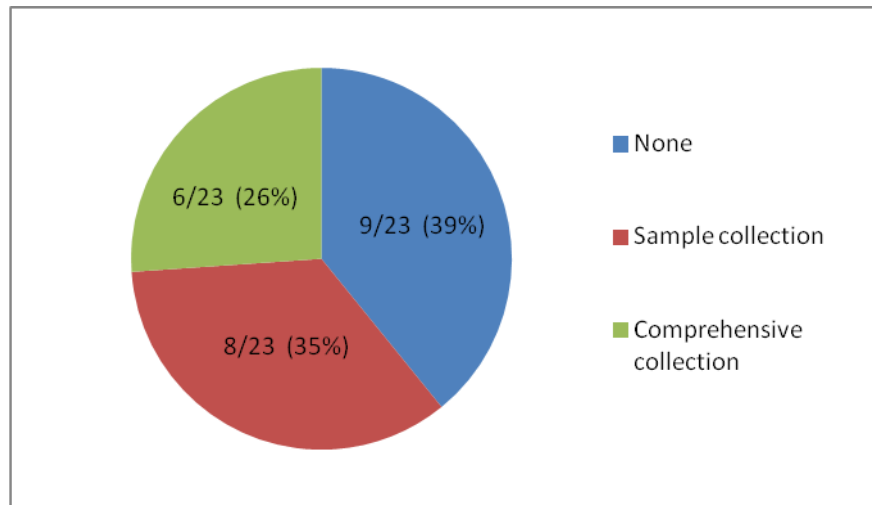


Figure 10: Photographic collections in digital format in Irish libraries

4.2.20 Genealogical/Family History Content

9/23 library websites (39%) included genealogical content in a digital format (including indices). The remaining 16 library authorities (61%) did not have any genealogical content on their website.

4.2.21 Educational Content

It was decided to evaluate whether local studies services work with schools and others is also reflected in the digital content up online in Irish public library websites. It was discovered that only 2/23 library services (6%) include digital content specifically targeted at the education sector.

4.2.22 Decade of Centenaries Content

The period from 1912 to 1922 was one of the most seminal and eventful in Irish history. The 1913 Lockout, World War 1, 1916 Rising, Irish War of Independence and Irish Civil War are some of the historic events that took place in this period. The period from 2012 to 2022 has been earmarked as the ‘decade of centenaries’. A huge programme of events, commemorations

and publications are currently taking place to mark this. Public libraries are heavily involved in these activities also.

The content analysis found that 9/23 (39%) library services have digital content up directly related to the decade of centenaries. The remaining 14 (61%) do not have any digital content.

Commemorative Projects

Dublin City Public Library & Archive have a varied programme of activities for the Decade of Commemorations, including a project to digitise the City Electoral Rolls for 1898-1915 and a number of exhibitions, lectures, and publications.

The Great War – online, exhibitions and lectures


The first shots of what became known as the First World War were fired on 28th July 1914. Dublin City Public Libraries & Archive will be marking the Great War and Dubliners' role in it, drawing on our extensive collections.

Our first project is the online publication of the unique Monica Roberts Collection – digitised and transcribed, each item in the collection will be published as fully-searchable online database in 2014.

The Royal Dublin Fusiliers Archive and the Monica Roberts Collection form just part of our extensive material relating to the Great War. We are adding to this collection, and this year we have received significant donations to the Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association Archive.

A number of exhibitions drawn from these collections will be staged from 2014 on.

- **Stories from the Great War**
An exhibition at Dublin City Library & Archive, Pearse Street, featuring material from the Royal Dublin Fusiliers Archive, the Monica Roberts Collection, and other collections - October-December 2014.
- **Dublin and the First World War**
A programme of lectures in the Autumn City Hall Lunch-time Lecture series - October 2014.
- **Letters from the Great War**
A travelling exhibition of material from the Monica Roberts Collection - end 2014.
- **Stories from Gallipoli**
An exhibition at Dublin City Library & Archive, Pearse Street, drawn from the Royal Dublin Fusiliers Archive and other collections - March-May 2015.




The Dublin Festival of History

DUBLIN FESTIVAL OF HISTORY 2014

The annual Dublin Festival of History will each year to 1919 feature talks and exhibitions on the First World War, beginning with the 2014 Festival which runs from 29th September to 8th October.

Digitisation Projects



The Monica Roberts Collection

Monica Roberts was a young woman from Ballyorgan, County Dublin who at the outset of the First World War set up a society 'The Band of Helpers for Soldiers' to send comforts to Irish men at the Front. The collection consists of 8 volumes of letters and postcards (approximately 500 letters) received by Monica from men serving in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers and the Royal Flying Corps.

Each item has been digitised and transcribed and the collection will be published as fully-searchable online database in 2014.

Dubliners 1898-1915

The Dublin City Electoral Rolls 1898-1915 consist of eighteen printed volumes listing all those who were eligible to vote, including lodgers; rated occupiers; inhabitant householders, and Freeholders and Leaseholders. The digitisation will result in 620,000 records of Dubliners and the data will complement and book-end the online Census Records for 1901 and 1911.

Five rolls, those for 1908-1912 and 1915 have been digitised and a fully searchable database with images of the original pages published on www.dublinheritage.ie




Figure 11: Sample of digital content that Dublin City Libraries have created for the 'Decade of Centenaries'

4.3 Findings from Questionnaire

As described in the methodology in the previous chapter, a questionnaire was emailed to all thirty-one local studies librarians in Ireland. A reminder email was sent a fortnight later. A total of twenty-four out of thirty-one librarians responded initially to the questionnaire.

The majority replied through the online survey, with four librarians emailing the results in Word format. These four were manually added to the online survey subsequently.

Two of the respondents only completed the opening few questions of the questionnaire however. These two questionnaires were therefore discounted from the results. Therefore, the final response rate to the questionnaire was 24/31 librarians (77%). This is classified as a ‘very good’ response rate (Bryman, 2012, p. 235).

4.3.1 Objective 1: To provide an overview of the local studies digital content available on the websites of Irish public libraries, including the formats of digital content available.

The findings of the content analysis of digital content (included in section 4.2) provide much information on how Irish public libraries are presenting digital content today. The following question and finding also contributed towards this objective.

Question 5: What % overall of your authority’s entire local studies holdings are up online in digital format?

The majority of respondents 19/24 (79%) stated that 0-5% of their collection was up online (Figure 12). 2/24 (8%) estimated that between 10-20% of their

collection was up online, with the same amount 2/24 (8%) stating that 10-20% of their local studies collection was available online in digital format. One librarian (4%) indicated that more than 20% of their holdings were up online.

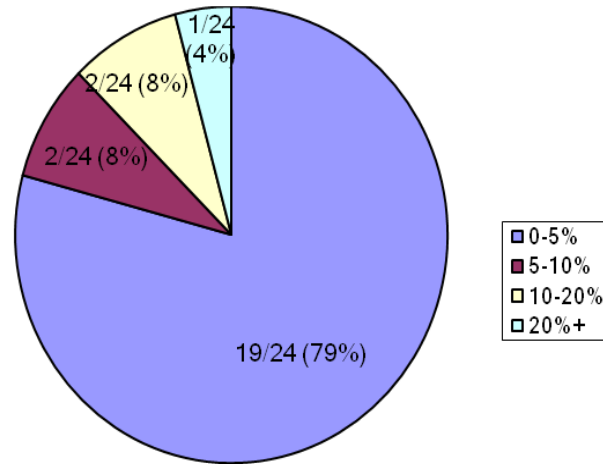


Figure 12: Percentage of local studies holdings up online

4.3.2 Objective 2: To explore how digital content is created, focusing on the influencing factors and policies.

The following questions help answer this research objective.

Question 2: Does your service have any ongoing digitisation projects?

19/23 (83%) of the librarians who answered this question declared that their service has ongoing digitisation projects. The remaining 4 (17%) said that they do not have any ongoing digitisation projects at present.

Question 3: Has your local studies service digitised material which was not added to the library website?

19/24 (79%) of librarians stated that their library has digitised material which was subsequently not added to the website. A variety of reasons were given for content not being added. These were:

- Copyright concerns
- Lack of time and staffing issues
- IT issues
- Digitisation of some content was only undertaken for preservation reasons
- Plans to add more of this content to the website on a phased basis
- Digital content was added to website ‘as a taster’ to the collection or for a specific project.

These findings emphasise that not all digital local studies digital content that has been created is added to library service websites.

Question 10: Does your library service have a formal digitisation policy?

9/24 respondents (37.5%) recorded that their service had a formal digitisation policy. A majority, 15/24 (62.5%) do not.

As outlined in the table below, the local studies librarian was most frequently cited as the person responsible for deciding the digitisation policy.

<i>Individual who decides digitisation policy</i>	<i>Number of Times Cited</i>
Local Studies Librarian	4
Senior Management	3
IT Librarian	1

Table 4 : Who Decides the Formal Digitisation Policy

Question 12: Which factors are most important when deciding what to digitise?

The librarians identified these in the following order:

1. Increased access & demand from users.
2. Preservation
3. Copyright
4. Subject area
5. Geography

	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Increased access & demand from users	62.50% 15	16.67% 4	12.50% 3	4.17% 1	4.17% 1	24
Copyright issues	20.83% 5	20.83% 5	20.83% 5	29.17% 7	8.33% 2	24
Geography	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	16.67% 4	20.83% 5	62.50% 15	24
Preservation	12.50% 3	37.50% 9	29.17% 7	16.67% 4	4.17% 1	24
Subject area	4.17% 1	25.00% 6	20.83% 5	29.17% 7	20.83% 5	24

Table 5: Factors most important when creating digital content

Question 13: Are there other groups in your area currently involved in digitising content for your local studies service?

- 9/24 (37.5%) of respondents answered yes to this question.

Local history groups were the most frequent group cited as being involved in helping create digital local studies content. Other groups identified included active retirement groups, employment schemes and individual volunteers.

Question 16: Do you encourage users to create content to be added to the website?

Following on from the question above, 5/24 (22%) stated that they encouraged users to create content. A majority of 19/24 (78%) do not.

Question 19: Who undertakes digitisation in your local studies authority?

12/24 (50%) indicated that library staff undertake this work (Figure 12). 4/24 librarians (17%) indicated that this work is outsourced to external organisations.

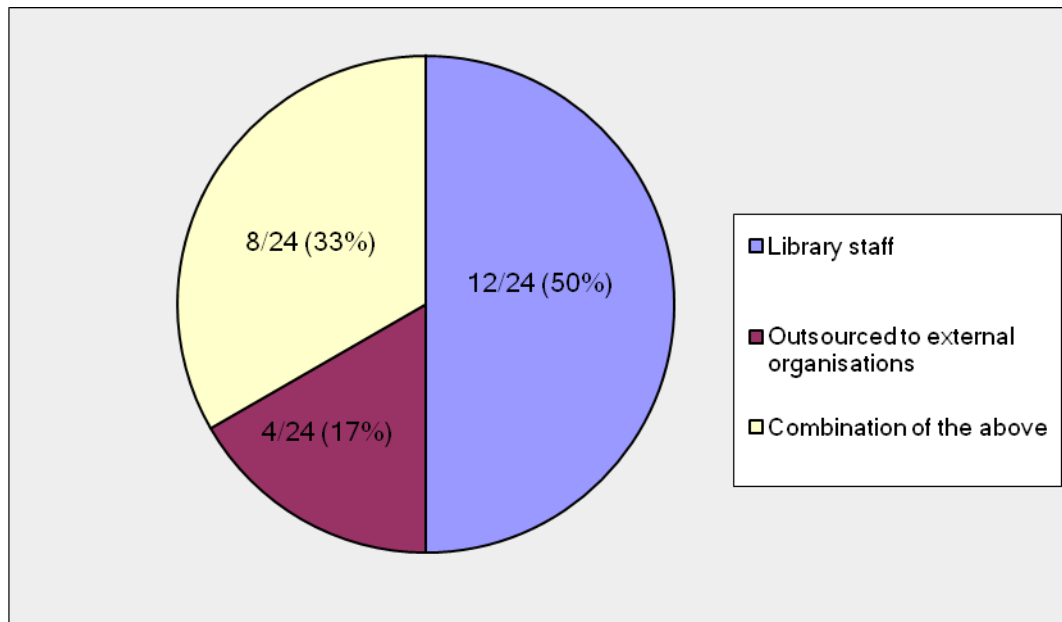


Figure 13: Who undertakes digitisation work?

Question 20: How many library staff are involved in creating digital local studies content as part of their duties?

The principal findings here were:

- 5/24 (21%) librarians stated that they do not have any staff member involved in creating digital local studies content as part of their duties.
- The number of staff involved in creating digital local studies content is an average of 1.56.
- This compares to an average of 2 staff employed in local studies across the relevant authorities (This data was obtained from question 10 in the questionnaire, included in appendix 3).

Several librarians stressed that some staff working in the local studies section (including the local studies librarian) have other library service duties and responsibilities outside of the local studies service.

Question 23: Equipment for Adding Digital Content

A flatbed scanner (22/24, 92%) and digital camera (21/24, 88%) are located in the vast majority of local studies libraries (Figure 13). Standalone PCs and both types of microfilm readers are also fairly common. Only 5/24 (21%) have a book scanner. None had a drum scanner. Digital audio recorders were also mentioned by one librarian.

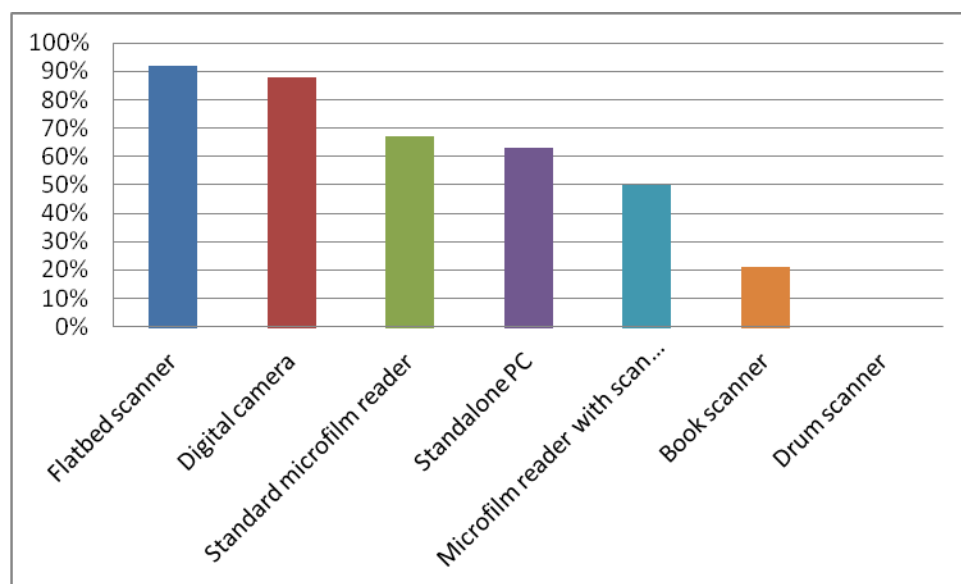


Figure 14: Equipment for Adding Digital Content in Local Studies Libraries

Question 24: Do you have a dedicated work area for digitisation projects?

8/24 (33.3%) of local studies librarians responded to state that they have a dedicated work area for digitisation projects. Two thirds do not have such an area however, with 16/24 (66.6%) of librarians answering the question negatively.

4.3.3 Objective 3 : To investigate the views of local studies staff towards digital content, including training needs and perceived impact upon service delivery

The following questions included in the questionnaire aimed to help achieve this objective.

Question 6: Would you agree with the statement that your online digital content is a satisfactory representation of the holdings?

Three quarters of respondents 18/24 (75%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the above statement (Figure 14). Only 4/24 (17%) of librarians either agreed or strongly agreed that their online digital content is a satisfactory representation of their library services' holdings.

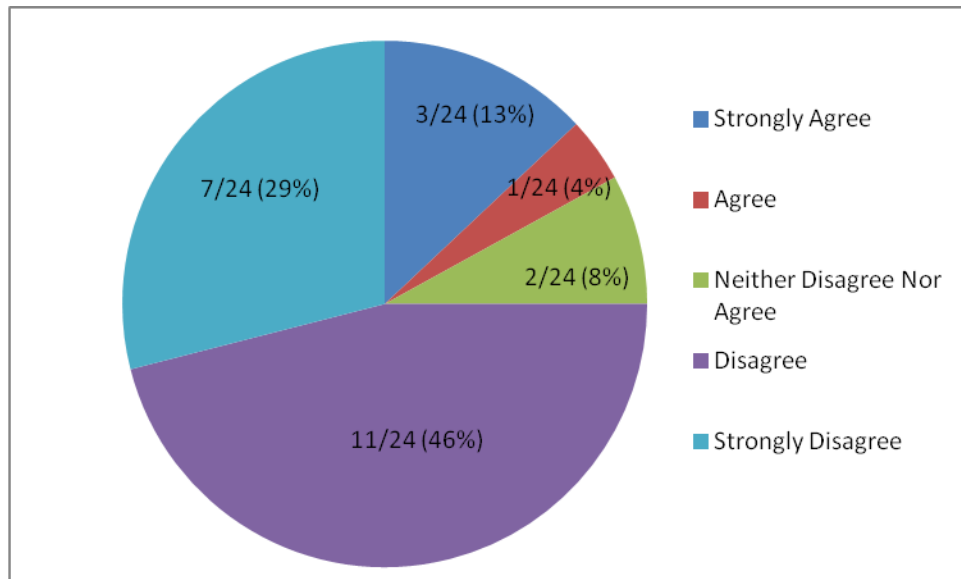


Figure 15: Views of librarians on whether their online content is a satisfactory representation of the holdings

Question 7: What type of digitized content would you like to see more of added to your library's website?

- Images proved the most popular requested format for content, with 22/22 librarians (100%) wishing to see more images on their website.
- Maps and manuscripts were also popular, with 18/19 librarians (95%) answering that they would like to see more content in this format.
- 17/18 (94%) of librarians answered that they would like more books/journals/articles available in digital content. 1 librarian said they did not wish to see more content added in that format.
- 17/17 librarians indicated that they would like to see more digital content in both audio/film/podcast and database/indices formats.
- 19/21 (90%) answered that they wished for more newspapers/directories in digital format on their library website. 2/21 (10%) do not.

Question 8: The Advantages in Adding Digital Content To the Library Website

A range of advantages in adding digital content were identified by respondents to the survey. The most frequently listed was that of increased access. 23/24 (96%) included the increased access to resources facilitated through online digital content.

It provides people with better access to our resources. This especially applies to people who are living abroad. (Respondent 6)

Other advantages listed by respondents included:

- 9/24 (38%) identified preservation and conservation of originals as an advantage of creating digital content.

- Promotion of the collections and library resources through adding digital content was cited by 8/24 (33%) of respondents.
- 3/24 (13%) cited saving staff time and resultant increased productivity as an advantage of adding digital content to the website.
- Only 1/24 (4%) included the possibility of attracting increased donations of content to the service as an advantage.
- 1 librarian (4%) stated that increased digitisation of content can help justify future spending on the collections through increased usage of materials (respondent 1).

Question 9: Barriers in Adding Digital Content to the Library Website

An absence of resources was the principal barrier identified from the questionnaire:

- 22/24 (92%) included lack of staff (and staff time) as a barrier to adding digital content. The absence of qualified staff was highlighted by some also.
- 13/24 (54%) identified financial constraints (including the cost of equipment) as a barrier to adding digital content.
- 6/24 (25%) listed I.T. issues and policies as a barrier.
- 5/24 (21%) mentioned copyright concerns as a barrier in adding digital content.

Question 14: Has the addition of digital content had a positive or negative impact on your service?

- A majority of respondents 22/23 (96%) answered that adding digital content has had a positive impact on their service. Local studies librarians recognise the possibilities offered through adding digital content.

Question 27: What are your views on the Ask about Ireland website? Is it used? How could it be improved?

Conflicting views on the *Ask about Ireland* website emerge from the survey. Many respondents highlighted the value of the site both to each library service and to their users. The inclusion of the digitised Griffith's Valuation 19th Century census substitute was mentioned.

Very easy to access and very useful, particularly in relation to Griffith's Valuation. (respondent 14)

Important site for advertising the various collections across the country. Yes it is obviously used as we receive enquiries relating to content we have supplied. (respondent 24)

The value of the *Ask about Ireland* website in facilitating partnership and for training purposes was highlighted by several (respondents 13, 17 and 22).

Other librarians expressed negative views on the site in their response however. The lack of awareness of the site by potential users was cited by several as an issue.

Not used enough by its target audience because they do not know about it. (respondent 3)

Others complained about the layout and content currently on the site. One highlighted their inability to identify who had created some of the content up on the site (respondent 1).

We were very disappointed with the subsequent re-design – we felt it effectively ruined our work (two six-month long projects). (respondent 8)

4.3.4 Objective 4: To discover if and how library 2.0 and web 2.9 features are being used in Irish local studies collections online.

Question 17: Does the local studies service add content to social media sites such as YouTube, Flickr or Facebook?

- 17/24 (71%) stated that they do add content to social media.
- 7/24 (29%) answered that they did not add local studies content to social media sites.

Question 18: Are you aware of any other local history social media sites in your area (e.g. old photographs sites)

- Only 2/24 (8%) were not aware of any such sites.
- 11/22 (46%) indicated that they were aware of these sites.
- A further 11/22 (46%) stated that they have provide content to these local history social media sites.

4.3.4 Objective 5: To explore future developments and issues that may impact upon local studies and digital content in the years ahead.

The following questions were included as a method of achieving this objective.

Question 25: Would you be in favour of increased national co-ordination in digitisation?

A massive 20/23 (87%) are in favour of increased national co-ordination (Figure 15).

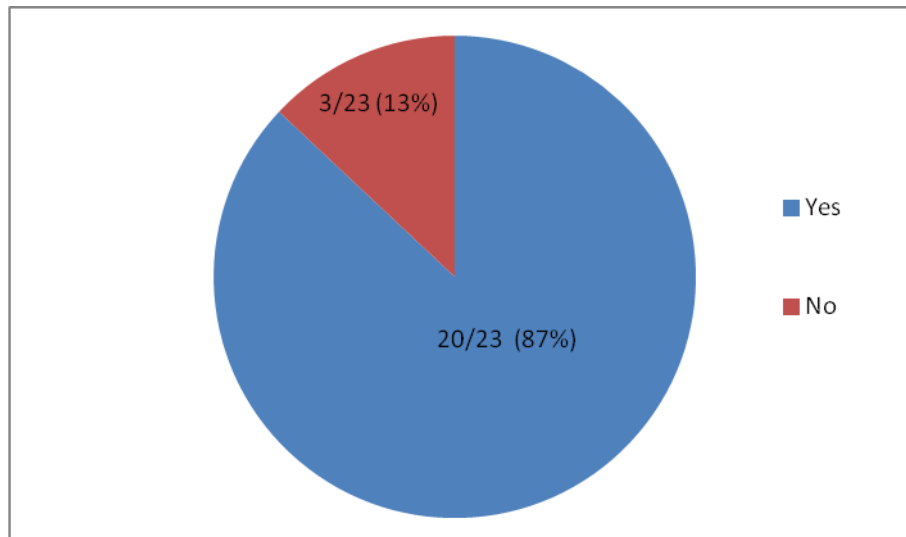


Figure 16: Percentage in favour of increased national co-ordination

Question 28: What are your general views about digital content and local studies in Ireland? What future developments would you like to see happen in this area?

Positive aspects of digital local studies content was highlighted by several librarians, including in the following response:

... a comparison of what digital content was available even 10 years ago ompared to today brings home how much has been achieved. (respondent 21).

Other librarians expressed disappointment in what has been achieved.

I am shocked at how little work has happened in digitisation in most library services. Library services need to be kicked in the backside on this issue! (respondent 8).

One librarian made the following honest assessment of the issues with adding digital content in their authority.

Many libraries have excellent online local studies content. Others very little – mainly due to staff resources. Digitisation of material is very time-consuming and in our own case with only 1 person working part-time in the local studies area it is impossible to undertake at present. (respondent 12).

Another highlighted how adding digital content does not necessarily mean scanning content.

Typing text into a PC is digitizing that text. As librarians we are interested in the content not the format. (respondent 7).

Many respondents highlighted the positive impact of digitisation on their local studies service. Increased access to and awareness of the resources of the local studies service was cited by several respondents.

Huge positive uptake of digitised local newspaper which greatly adds to number of queries and further information requests as well as requests for further digitisation of material. Online Journal averages 1,000 hits per week and creates similar demands as above. (respondent 23)

It has enhanced the reputation hugely. Half of the traffic to the local authority website is to the library section and most of this is to the local studies section. (respondent 8).

Another advantage of digital content highlighted from the survey include increased staff productivity as digitisation has reduced time spent searching and makes it easier to answer queries (respondents 7, 18).

The impact of digitisation on originals receives a mixed response in the survey however. Some respondents reported that digitisation had resulted in less demand for originals (respondents 4, 8, 11 and 18). Others stated that the increased awareness of the local studies collections following digitisation resulted in increased demand for some originals (respondents 13 and 16). A couple of librarians recognised that the absence of digital local studies content in their authority meant that it was not possible to assess the impact on service delivery (respondents 14 and 22).

13/24 (54%) of librarians reported that library staff receive training in digital local studies content.

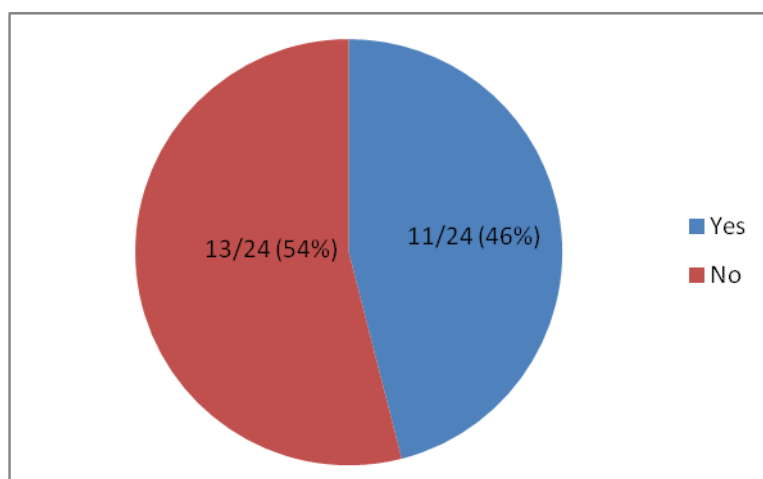


Figure 17: Do staff receive training in adding digital local studies content

The survey reveals that library staff (including the local studies librarian) provide much of the training (respondents 2, 3, 10, 13, 15, 18). External organisations are frequently sourced for training in adding digital content also (respondents 13, 15, 23, 24). I.T. Departments of library authorities were also cited (respondents 6 and 9).

The survey also found that librarians recognize the need for training and continued professional development to deal with adding digital local studies content.

We need regular training to keep up to date with new technical developments to ensure that our website is relevant and easy to use. (respondent 13).

Some expressed frustration at the lack of training available to library staff.

As present staff have had no training to date, any would be welcome. (respondent 12)

There is no further budget for training!!!! (respondent 19)

Specific training requirements that were included in the responses were:

- Training in website design/HTML/website content management (respondents 2, 3, 5, 8, 15, 22)
- Increased training in creating digital content (respondents 1, 2, 10, 11, 14, 18, 22, 23).

Training in dealing with copyright issues (respondents 10 and 18).

Question 27: What are your views on the Ask About Ireland website? Is it used? How could it be improved?

A common view expressed in the survey was that the AskAboutIreland site needed to be further promoted and updated (respondents 10, 13, 21, 23).

Ask About Ireland has been very valuable to start public libraries on the road to creating new digital content. I think it now needs an injection of finance and expertise to keep it relevant. (respondent 13).

The potential of the site was recognised also.

It could act as a central search engine for all digitised material in Ireland. (respondent 18)

Needs to concentrate on local/county material to give each authority or library service more back. Digital copies of material given to local libraries for inclusion on their own sites. (respondent 23)

Question 28: What are your general views about digital content and local studies in Ireland? What future developments would you like to see happen in this area?

The majority of respondents highlighted the potential of adding digital local studies content. The clear need for local studies sections to continue to create and add digital local studies content was included in many responses. (respondents 5, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17, 21, 22, 23).

Providing digital content is the way of the future, libraries need to embrace it or their local studies sections could become redundant (respondent 13).

The need for increased resources (financial and staffing) was highlighted in many of the responses (respondents 2, 16, 19, 21, 23, 24).

Another desired outcome in many of the responses was for increased co-ordination and partnerships between library authorities. This often included

a call for common standards for digital local studies content across all authorities. (respondents 2, 5, 10, 13, 18, 22, 24).

Co-ordination between the different authorities would be a good idea. Co-operation between different agencies such as the National Library and the National Museum particularly in the area of sharing digital content. Organizations within the public sector should exchange content and be allowed to add value to that content without copyright being an issue (respondent 5).

4.4 Summary of Findings

This chapter has listed comprehensive findings obtained from the data collection methods. The findings from the content analysis of the websites of Irish public libraries are organised under the evaluation framework listed in appendix two. Twenty-two separate findings relating to the detailed content analysis of digital content on Irish public library websites are included.

The questionnaire also produced extensive findings for this research project. The principal findings from the answers received to the questionnaire are organised under the five objectives of this work. The next chapter will discuss how these findings relate to the research objectives, along with a discussion on the significance of the findings.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses and analyses the findings of this work by examining the findings in conjunction with the original objectives of the study. The discussion and analysis is framed by several key questions.

1. Which findings relate to the aims and objectives of the study?
2. How do the findings relate to the existing literature and previous studies on digital local studies content?
3. Are the aims and objectives of this dissertation achieved successfully through the findings?
4. Do the findings contribute to the overall field of digital local studies content?

The chapter is organised by the order of the five principal objectives of this research project (as outlined in chapter 1).

The chapter also includes a discussion on the research methodologies used for this research project. A summary of the discussion is provided at the end of the chapter.

5.2 Discussion on Objective 1:

(To provide an overview of the local studies digital content available on the websites of Irish public libraries, including the formats of digital content available.)

The website content analysis and the findings generated greatly facilitated the pursuit of this objective. It helped produce detailed data on the digital local studies content available on the websites of Irish public library authorities, including the formats available. It showed that nearly every library service website included external links and information on the local studies service on their homepage (see 4.2.1 and 4.2.2). Such practices are recommended in the literature (Reid, 2003, p. 106).

The most significant finding from the content analysis is that there is a huge contrast among Irish public libraries in how they present digital local studies content on their website. A substantial 8/31 (26%) of Irish library authorities do not have any digital local studies content up online at all (4.2.4). Mawe's 2007 study of UK libraries found that 55% of library authorities analysed did not have any digitised material up online (p. 52). Nevertheless, the fact that a significant minority of Irish library authorities do not have any digital local studies content up online on their website over ten years after the *Changing Libraries* digitisation strategy (2.3.3) was first initiated is sobering. In contrast, the analysis found that close to 40% of authorities have either digital content repositories or a comprehensive selection of digital content up on their website (4.2.4).

Disparity between library authorities also emerged when the analysis examined the formats of digital local studies content up online (see findings 4.2.13 to 4.2.22). The findings ranged from authorities having significant collections of various formats up online; with many other authorities having no examples of common formats (such as photographic collections or audio-visual material) available on their website.

The findings from the content analysis also provide a strong overview of areas where the online digital content could be improved upon. The evaluative criteria for websites and digital content highlighted in chapter 2 (2.3.4) included common methods from the literature for evaluating websites. The findings from the analysis show that many authorities websites could be improved under many of the area highlighted including currency and authority (see findings 4.2.6 to 4.2.9).

5.3 Discussion on Objective 2

(To explore how digital content is created, focusing on the influencing factors and policies.)

The content analysis provided limited information on the creation of digital content, apart from finding 4.2.12 which found that library staff alone do not create digital local studies content for their websites.

The questionnaire included several questions directly related to exploring how digital content is created and the influencing factors and policies. The findings most relevant to this objective are presented in the previous chapter (4.3.1). An interesting finding is that increased access and demand from users, was the most important factor identified by the local studies librarians

for creating digital content. This tallies with the existing literature (Hughes, 2004; Hume & Lock, 2002;). Similarly, preservation is cited as an important factor both by respondents and in the existing literature (Astle & Muir, 2002; Smith & Rowley, 2002).

The findings also reveal that Irish libraries have sufficient equipment for adding digital content.

Another insightful finding from the questionnaires is that the majority of local studies librarians revealed that they have created digital local studies content that was subsequently not added to the website of their library service (4.3.2).

The respondents also stated that library staff undertake the bulk of digitisation work undertaken by their authority. Answering a different question, only 5/24 (22%) of the respondents stated that they encouraged library users to create digital content to be added to the website. Similarly, less than half of authorities had groups involved in digitising content for their service. These findings clash with recommendations in the existing literature on creating digital content, which emphasize the advantages of collaboration and involving users (Hughes, 2004, pp. 121; Tedd, 2011). It is not always practical for local studies services to have others involved in creating digital content (due to lack of resources or physical space).

Another surprising finding from the questionnaire is that a majority of respondents stated that their service did not have a formal digitisation policy. When asked, two thirds of librarians also answered that their service did not have a dedicated work area for digitisation projects. This is surprising, considering that the review of the literature in chapter 2 highlighted the importance of digital local studies content to national library policy (2.3.3).

The literature also emphasizes the need for planning and preparation (Hughes, 2004; Jordan, 2006).

The findings from the questionnaire help show how digital content is created in Irish library authorities, thus achieving this objective. They add to our knowledge of local studies digital content in Irish public.

5.4 Discussion on Objective 3:

(To investigate the views of local studies staff towards digital content, including training needs and perceived impact upon service delivery)

The views of local studies staff on digital content were accessed through the data received from the questionnaire. Both quantitative and qualitative information was received from the survey (4.3.2).

The findings from the questionnaire (4.3.2) provide an insight into the views of local studies librarians on digital content. A key finding is that the overwhelming majority of librarians who responded (96%) felt that adding digital content had a positive impact on their service. The advantages of adding digital content were also highlighted by many respondents, with increased access to local studies resources cited most often. It is evident from the findings that local studies librarians would like to see more digitisation taking place. They understand the advantages of digital content creation as outlined in the literature review in chapter 2.

The findings also reflect the barriers, issues and failures of digital local studies content creation in Irish public libraries however. The most revealing finding from the questionnaire is that only 4/24 (17%) of librarians agreed that their online digital content is a satisfactory representation of their

overall holdings. This shows that most librarians recognize that their online digital local studies content needs to be improved. The findings also reveal the type of content that librarians would like added to their website and the principal barriers to adding digital content.

Local studies librarians also included honest assessments of local studies digital content in Irish public libraries in their responses, expressing disappointment at what has been achieved and highlighting the barriers to creating digital content. Lack of resources (particularly staffing) is a frequent complaint received from the questionnaire. This again reflects what was included in the literature review, which highlighted these barriers to digital content creation (2.3.2).

The findings also reveal the views of staff towards the *AskAboutIreland* portal website. Both positive and negative aspects of the site were revealed in the findings. It is evident from the majority of respondents however, that local studies librarians believe fervently that the site needs to be updated and re-assessed in the years ahead. This is not reflected in the sparse literature on Irish libraries and digital content.

Current practice in the provision of staff training in delivering digital content is also highlighted through the findings of the survey. An important finding is that just over a half of library staff receive training in adding digital local studies content. It is evident from the findings that local studies librarians recognise the need for training and continued professional development. Specific training requirements were also listed by respondents.

The majority of respondents (96%) feel that adding digital content has had a positive impact on their service. The findings fail to reveal the full impact of digitisation on the delivery of local studies services however. The impact of

digitisation on originals received a mixed response from respondents, with some librarians stating that it resulted in less demand while others reported that digitisation had resulted in increased demand. This finding is at odds with the existing literature, which frequently cites the reduced demand for originals as a consequence of digitisation (2.3.2).

Several respondents also stated that it was not possible for them to assess the impact of digital content on the delivery of services as their authority did not have any local studies digital content.

5.5 Discussion on Objective 4:

(To discover if and how library 2.0 and web 2.0 features are being used in Irish local studies collections online)

The two data collection methods used contributed towards finding out the extent to which Irish local studies collections make use of library 2.0 and web 2.0 features.

Firstly, the findings from the website content analysis (4.2.10) show that only a few local studies services have their own social media account. Little use is made of web 2.0 for displaying digital local studies content by nearly a half of local studies services evaluated. The content analysis findings (4.2.11) also discovered that only a small number of library services include library 2.0 features on their website (4.2.11).

In contrast, a majority of respondents to the questionnaire stated that they had added local studies digital content to social media sites. This conflict may be due to the wording of the question, with the librarians either misinterpreting social media sites or includes non-library sites in their response.

The findings also discover that many local studies librarians stated that they have provided content to other local history social media sites in their area.

Nevertheless, the majority of Irish local studies services do not include web 2.0 or library 2.0 features. These findings contrast with the literature, which recommends extensive usage of these features by local studies in order to attract users (Smith & Rowley, 2012; Theimer, 2010). The findings from the research methods used contributes towards achieving the research objective.

5.6 Discussion on Objective 5:

(To explore future developments and issues that may impact upon local studies and digital content in the years ahead)

The responses from the questionnaire contributed immensely towards answering this research objective. In particular, part 4 of the questionnaire was beneficial as it asked several questions (questions 25, 27 and 28 included in appendix 3) that helped discover the views of local studies librarians on future issues and developments that may impact upon their area.

The findings (4.3.3) not only helped achieve the above objective, but also contribute to the overall field of digital local studies content in Irish libraries. They provided a very useful insight into the views of local studies librarians on future developments.

A significant finding is that the overwhelming majority of librarians are in favour of increased national co-ordination in digitisation. Although the literature review highlighted previous national strategies for digitisation (2.3.3), it is clear from the findings that local studies librarians want

increased national co-ordination and co-operation between different agencies. *The Ask About Ireland* website was identified by the librarians as having much potential but needing an update. One suggestion is that this portal site could act as a central search engine for digital content in Irish public libraries.

5.7 Discussion on Research Methods:

The research methods undertaken for this dissertation proved very beneficial when attempting to achieve the aim and objectives of the research project.

The detailed content analysis proved particularly effective at evaluating websites of Irish library authorities. The evaluative criteria and coding schedule (appendix two) drawn from the literature was apt. Although time-consuming and requiring attention to detail, it proved effective at providing a deeper overview of digital local studies content in Irish public libraries. The greater insight it provided into digital local studies content certainly proved that it is a more suitable data collection method than a simple checklist for evaluating digital local studies content. This was also highlighted in the literature (2.3.4). It also ensured that all libraries were evaluated and treated equally.

The questionnaire circulated to all local studies librarians was also effective in obtaining findings for this research project. The mixture of types of questions (open and closed) ensured that much useful quantitative and qualitative data was obtained. The excellent response rate received is evidence that the research process undertaken was successful. The latter type

was particularly useful when seeking fuller answers from the local studies librarians. Although the questionnaire helped towards obtaining the objectives of this project, there were a couple of questions that could have been constructed better. Other questions could have been included also. Nevertheless, the use of questionnaires in this dissertation proved successful. This will be discussed further in the final chapter.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The central research aim of this dissertation was to present an informative overview and analysis of digital local studies content in Irish public libraries today.

The associated objectives were:

1. To provide an overview of the local studies digital content available on the websites of Irish public libraries, including the formats of digital content available.
2. To explore how digital content is created, focusing on the influencing factors and policies.
3. To investigate the views of local studies staff towards digital content, including training needs and perceived impact upon service delivery
4. To discover if and how library 2.0 and web 2.0 features are being used in Irish local studies collections online
5. To explore future developments and issues that may impact upon local studies and digital content in the years ahead.

This work has achieved this aim. Through the use of an extensive website content analysis and detailed questionnaire, this dissertation presents an informative overview and analysis of digital local studies content in Irish public libraries today.

- It has given a percentage breakdown and overview of digital local studies content on Irish public library website, including the formats (objective 1).
- The factors and policies that influence digital content creation were detailed (objective 2)
- The views of local studies staff toward digital content creation were compiled and highlighted (objective 3)
- An analysis of the use of web 2.0 and library 2.0 content by Irish local studies libraries was also included (objective 4).
- A synopsis of current and future issues in the whole area of digital local studies content creation was also included in the findings (objective 5).

6.2 Reflection On The Work

The review of the literature (outlined in chapter 2) proved very beneficial for familiarising myself with the relevant topics. The literature on evaluating digital content was particularly useful when drawing up the methodology. The main theme of the review was the immense impact that digital content creation has had on libraries and on local studies services. The review also showed that this is no different for Irish public libraries, though the review also highlighted the paucity of available literature on digital local studies content and public libraries. The review showed that my research topic was clearly under-represented in the literature.

The methodologies used for this study proved very effective, as discussed in the previous chapter. The website content analysis created for evaluating the digital local studies content was very useful. It provided an excellent overview of the current state of current digital local studies content in Irish public libraries. This researcher certainly believes that it could be replicated and adopted for future studies of digital local studies content.

The questionnaire was also very useful in helping obtain data from the local studies librarians. The use of an online survey and phoning ahead proved particularly valuable for increasing the response rate. An online survey alone will not suffice however for a survey of Irish librarians however, as some authorities I.T. networks block such surveys. Therefore, a Word (or similar) version of a survey also needs to be included (as it was here) in order to maximize the response rate. The quantitative and qualitative data obtained from the questionnaire was invaluable for the overall research objectives. There were a few questions that could have been excluded however, as they were not included in the eventual findings. A few of the questions were not constructed as effectively as they could have been also, which resulted in unsatisfactory data being received as respondents mis-understood the question being asked of them. This is a lesson that this researcher learned for future.

Another suggestion that any future study should note, is that this study would have been improved further by the inclusion of interviews. Semi-Structured or unstructured interviews with a number of local studies librarians would have helped tease out further some of the responses received from the questionnaire. Interviewing individuals from the

Department of the Environment and those responsible for managing the *AskAboutIreland* website would also have been productive.

Nevertheless, this study presents an informative overview and analysis of digital local studies content in Irish libraries. The evaluation of all library websites and the high response rate contribute towards making the findings valid. The author believes that the research methods used for this study could certainly be repeated in future studies on a similar subject.

6.3 Suggestions For Further Research

Following on from the extensive research undertaken for this dissertation, the researcher believes the following topics are ripe for further investigation and research:

- i) A detailed content analysis of the *AskAboutIreland* portal website
- ii) An investigation into the possibility of turning the *AskAboutIreland* site into a central search engine for all digital local studies content in Irish public libraries. This perhaps could also involve other stakeholders of digital content such as the National Library of Ireland or National Museum.
- iii) The ‘Decade of Centenaries, 1912-23’ offers libraries a unique opportunity to showcase their collections, including digital local studies content. A longitudinal study of how public libraries are promoting and creating digital content during this centenary period would be a worthwhile research topic.
- iv) An inventory of the knowledge and skills of local studies staff in Irish public libraries should be undertaken, particularly focusing on the skill levels relating to digital content. A training needs analysis could be undertaken as part of this survey.

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Appendices

Appendix One: Irish Public Library Websites

Carlow Libraries

<http://www.carlowlibraries.ie/index.html>

Cavan County Council's Library Service

http://cavanlibrary.ie/Default.aspx?StructureID_str=1

Clare County Library

<http://www.clarelibrary.ie/>

Cork City Libraries

<http://www.corkcitylibraries.ie/>

Cork County Library & Arts Service

<http://www.corkcoco.ie/co/web/Cork%20County%20Council/Departments/Library%20&%20Arts%20Service>

Donegal County Council Library Service

<http://www.donegallibrary.ie/>

Dublin City Public Libraries and Archive

<http://dublincity.ie/main-menu-services-recreation-culture/dublin-city-public-libraries-and-archive>

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Library Service

<http://www.dlrcoco.ie/library/>

Fingal Libraries

<http://www.fingalcoco.ie/community-and-leisure/libraries/>

Galway Library Service

<http://www.galway.ie/en/services/library/>

Kerry County Library

<http://kerrylibrary.ie/>

Kildare Library & Arts Service

<http://www.kildare.ie/Library/index.html>

Kilkenny County Library Service

<http://kilkennylibrary.kilkenny.ie/eng/>

Laois County Libraries

<http://www.laois.ie/LeisureandCulture/Libraries/>

Leitrim County Library Service

http://www.leitrimcoco.ie/eng/Services_A-Z/Library/

Limerick City Library Service

<http://www.limerickcity.ie/Library/>

Limerick County Library Service

<http://www.limerick.ie/council-service-group/libraries>

Longford Library Service

http://www.longfordlibrary.ie/lib_home.aspx

Louth County Libraries

<http://www.louthcoco.ie/en/Services/Library/>

Mayo County Library

<http://www.mayolibrary.ie/en/home/index.aspx>

Meath County Council Library Service

<http://www.meath.ie/Community/Libraries/>

Monaghan County Library Services

<http://www.monaghan.ie/en/services/library/>

Offaly County Library

<http://www.offaly.ie/eng/Services/Libraries/>

Roscommon County Council: Library Services

<http://www.roscommoncoco.ie/en/Services/Library/>

Sligo County Libraries

<http://www.sligolibrary.ie/sligolibrarynew/index.html>

South Dublin Libraries

<http://www.southdublinlibraries.ie/>

Tipperary Libraries

<http://www.tipperarylibraries.ie/>

Waterford City and County Libraries

<http://www.waterfordcity.ie/library/iguana/www.main.cls?url=WL>

Westmeath County Council Library Service

<http://www.westmeathcoco.ie/en/ourservices/tourismartsrecreation/libraryservice/>

Wexford Public Library Services

<http://www.wexford.ie/wex/Departments/Library/>

Wicklow County Council Library Service

<http://www.wicklow.ie/library-services>

Appendix Two: Evaluation Framework & Codes For Content Analysis

Part 1: Library website & features of digital content up online

1. Homepage of Library Website

Features digital local studies content on homepage of library service website	A
Includes link/mentions local studies collection on library service homepage	B
No mention of digital local studies content on library homepage	C

2. Links to External Local Studies Digital Content

Includes external websites with digital content	A
Only includes external digital content available through the library service	B
No links to websites or databases with local studies digital content provided	C

3. Requests donations to be added as digital content

Requests donations of content, to be added as digital content at a later date	A
Does not request such donations	B

4. Digital Local Studies Content

Own dedicated website/repository for digital local studies content	A
Comprehensive collection online	B
Sample collection online	C
No digital local studies content on website	D

5. Library Catalogue (OPAC)

Digital local studies content included on library catalogue	A
Local studies material can be searched for on library catalogue	B
No digital local studies content or local studies items on library catalogue.	C

6. Currency

New digital content added to website and dated consistently	A
Dates provided for some of digital content	B
No dates included for digital content	C

7. Searching

All digital content fully searchable	A
Limited searching of digital local studies content available	B
Browsing of content is the only option	C
No option to search digital content	D

8. Copyright

Copyright information/note included for all content	A
Some digital content has copyright/authorship information	B
No copyright/authorship information included	C

9. Metadata

Includes standard metadata criteria (e.g. Dublin CORE)	A
Basic metadata included for some digital content	B
No metadata included	C

10. Web 2.0

Local studies has own social media sites (e.g. Flickr)	A
Local studies content included in library service social media	B
No evidence of local studies digital content on library social media sites	C

11. Library 2.0

No evidence of library 2.0 features on digital local studies content	A
Some limited usage of library 2.0 features on website	B
Comprehensive usage of library 2.0 features of digital local studies content	C

12. Creator of digital content named

Library staff listed as creators of content	A
Other groups/individuals listed as creators of content	B
Combination of the above	C
Not named	D

13. Typed out/pdf/Word documents with local studies digital content

Digital content available in this format on the website	A
No digital content in this content on the website	B

Part 2: Digital Local Studies Content

14. Audio-Visual Material

Includes audio material (e.g. oral history recordings, podcasts of lectures etc.)	A
Includes video/film footage on website	B
Includes both of the above	C
Does not have any audio-visual material up on the website	D

15. Books & Journals

Includes digitised books/journals (or part of)	A
Includes searchable index of books/journals (or part of)	B
Both of the above types of digital content are included	C
No digital content of books/articles included on the website	D

16. Ephemera & Manuscript Material

Includes ephemera in digital format	A
Includes manuscript material in digital format	B
Includes both of the above	C
Does not have any ephemera or manuscript material up on the website	D

17. Maps

Includes original maps in digital format (apart from Ordnance Survey)	A
Only includes reference to Ordnance Survey historic maps being available digitally	B
Does not refer to any historic maps available in digital format on the website	C

18. Newspapers

Selection of digitised newspapers (or original articles) on website	A
Includes indices to newspapers	B
Both original content and indices available	C
No newspaper content available in digital format up on website	D

19. Photographs

No photographs or images on website	A
Sample collection of images up on website	B
Comprehensive collection of digital images on website	C
Only includes links to external digital image collections	D

20. Family History/Genealogy Material

No family history/genealogy digital content up online	A
Includes transcribed or indices to family history/genealogy content	B
Features digitised family history content	C

21. Digital Content specifically aimed at children/educational purposes

Comprehensive digital content targeted at children or educational purposes	A
Limited content	B
No evidence of content aimed at children or for educational purposes	C

22. Digital content relating to 'Decade of Commemorations, 1912-23' up on website

Site contains digital content relating to 1912-23 period	A
Does not have any such content	B

Appendix Three:
Questionnaire on Digital Local Studies Content in Irish Public
Libraries

By taking part in this research:

- **I understand that my participation in this project will involve completing a questionnaire about local studies services, including digital content and current issues.**
- **I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.**
- **I understand that no individual library service will be identified in the final research report or any future published material.**
- **I agree that by completing this questionnaire I am giving my consent for the data I have provided to be used for the process of research.**
- **I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time and am free to discuss my concerns with Kevin Murphy (kkm09@aber.ac.uk or Tel: 045879111) at any time.**

This research project adheres to the Department of Information Studies Aberystwyth Ethics Policy for Research & British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice.

Part 1: Digital Local Studies Content In Your Authority

1. Has digital local studies content been added to the website of your library service in the past? *(Put an X in the box that applies)*

☐

Yes

☐

No

2. Does your service have any ongoing digitisation projects?

☐

Yes

☐

No

3. Has your local studies service digitised material which was not added to the library website?

☐

Yes

☐

No

If yes, what are the reasons that it was not put up online?

4. Approximately, how many items of the following types are found in the collection?

Books/Journals

Photographs

Maps

Manuscript/Ephemera

Newspapers/Directories

Audio-Visual Items

Other

5. What % overall of your authority's entire local studies holdings are up online in digital format? (*pick one*)

0-5%	<input type="checkbox"/>	10-20%	<input type="checkbox"/>
5-10%	<input type="checkbox"/>	20% +	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Would you agree with the statement that your online digital content is a satisfactory representation of the holdings?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither Disagree Nor Agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly Disagree

7. What type of digitized content you would like to see added to your library's website?

Format	Yes	No
Images		
Maps/Manuscripts		
Books/Journals/Articles		
Newspapers		
Audio/Film/Podcast		
Database/Indices		
Others – please state		

8. In your experience, what are the main advantages in adding digital content to the library website?

9. What are the main barriers in adding digital local studies content to your library website? Please list these below:

10. Does your library service have a formal digitisation policy?

☐

Yes

☐

No

- a) If yes, who decides it?

11. How many staff work in the local studies department?

12. Which of the following factors are most important when deciding what content to digitise? *(Please rank them from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important consideration and 5 being the least important).*

	Rank
Access increased & demand from users	
Copyright issues	
Geography	
Preservation	
Subject area	

13. Are there other groups in your area currently involved in digitizing content for your local studies service e.g. CE Schemes, history groups etc.

☐

Yes

☐

No

Part 2: Service Delivery & Use of Social Media

14. Has the addition of digital content had a positive or negative impact on your service?

☐

Positive

☐

Negative

15. Describe the impact of digitisation on the delivery of day to day services, including demand for the originals?

16. Do you encourage users to create content to be added to the website?

☐

Yes

☐

No

If yes, what form does the encouragement take?

17. Does the local history service add content to social media sites such as YouTube, Flickr or Facebook?

☐

Yes

☐

No

18. Are you aware of any other local history social media sites in your area (e.g. old photographs sites)

☐

Yes, have provided content to them.

☐

Yes, aware of such sites.

☐

No, not aware of any such sites in this area.

Part 3: Staff & Training

19. Who undertakes digitisation in your local studies authority?

Library staff

Outsourced to external organisations

Combination of the above.

No digitisation has been undertaken in recent years.

20. How many library staff are involved in creating digital local studies content as part of their duties?

21. Do local studies staff receive training in adding digital content?

Yes

No

a) If yes, who provides the training. (*Put in an X if the answer is yes*)

Local studies librarian	
Other library/local studies staff	
External training	
Combination of the above	

22. What are the principal training requirements that your local studies service requires? What would you like to see happen in the years ahead?

--

23. Which of the following types of equipment do you have for adding digital content?

<i>Piece of Equipment</i>	<i>X if Yes, blank if No.</i>
Flatbed scanner	
Book scanner	
Drum scanner	
Digital camera	
Standard microfilm reader	
Microfilm reader with scan to pdf option	
Standalone PC	
Others?	

24. Do you have a dedicated work area for digitisation projects?

☐

Yes

☐

No

Part 4: National Policy

25. Would you be in favour of increased national co-ordination in digitisation?

☐

Yes

☐

No

26. Do you contribute material to the Ask About Ireland portal website?

☐

Yes

☐

No

27. What are your views on the Ask About Ireland website? Is it used?
How could it be improved?

28. What are your general views about digital content and local studies
in Ireland? What future developments would you like to see happen in
this area?

Thank you for your time, it is hoped to share results of this survey at a future
date.

Many Thanks,

Kevin Murphy

Kkm09@aber.ac.uk